



European Territorial Cooperation

INTERREG VI-A Italia-Malta programme

Summary

1. Joint programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses.....	5
1.1 Programme area (not required for Interreg C programmes).....	5
1.2 Joint programme strategy: Summary of main joint challenges, taking into account economic, social and territorial disparities as well as inequalities, joint investment needs and complimentary and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments, lessons-learnt from past experience and macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies where the programme area as a whole or partially is covered by one or more strategies. Reference: point (b) of Article 17(3), point (b) of Article 17(9).....	6
1.3 Justification for the selection of policy objectives and the Interreg-specific objectives, corresponding priorities, specific objectives and the forms of support, addressing, where appropriate, missing links in cross-border infrastructure	17
2. Priority	25
2.1 Title of PRIORITY 1 (OS1) - A smarter area of cooperation to promote research and innovation and the development of skills for smart specialisation.....	25
2.1.1 Specific objective 1.1 (i) - Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies in the cross-border area	25
2.1.2 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate.....	25
2.1.3 Indicators.....	26
2.1.4 Main target groups.....	27
2.1.5 Indication of the specific targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools	27
2.1.6 Planned use of financial instruments	27
2.1.7 Indicative breakdown of EU programme resources by type of intervention	27
2.1.8 Specific objective 1.2 (iv) - Develop skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship in the cross-border area	28
2.1.9 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate	28
2.1.10 Indicators.....	29
2.1.11 Main target groups	29
2.1.12 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools.....	30
2.1.13 Planned use of financial instruments	30
2.1.14 Indicative breakdown of EU programme resources by type of intervention.....	30
2.2 Title of PRIORITY 2 (OS2) A resilient cooperation area, which strengthens the protection and preservation of nature also through the efficient use of resource.....	30
2.2.1 Specific objective 2.1 (iv) - Promoting climate change adaptation, disaster risk prevention and resilience in the cross-border area	30
2.2.2 Related type of actions and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate.....	31
2.2.3 Indicators.....	32
2.2.4 Main target groups.....	32
2.2.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial	

tools.....	33
2.2.6 Planned use of financial instruments	33
2.2.7 Indicative breakdown of EU programme resources by type of intervention	33
2.2.8 Specific objective 2.2 (vi) - Promoting the transition to a circular economy in the cross-border area.....	33
2.2.9 Relate types of actions, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate.....	33
2.2.10 Indicators.....	34
2.2.11 Main target groups	35
2.2.12 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools.....	35
2.2.13 Planned use of financial instruments	35
2.2.14 Indicative breakdown of EU programme resources by type of intervention.....	35
2.2.15 Specific objective 2.3 (vii) - Strengthening the protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity, green infrastructure and reducing pollution in the cross-border area	36
2.2.16 Related type of actions and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate.....	36
2.2.17 Indicators.....	38
2.2.18 Main target groups	38
2.2.19 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools.....	39
2.2.20 Planned use of financial instruments	39
2.2.21 Indicative breakdown of EU programme resources by type of intervention.....	39
2.3 Title of PRIORITY 3 (PO4) – An area of efficient cooperation in social capital through the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development	39
2.3.1 Specific objective 3.1 (vi) - Strengthening the role of culture and sustainable tourism in the cross-border area in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation	39
2.3.2 Related types of action and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate.....	39
2.3.3 Indicators.....	41
2.3.4 Main target groups.....	41
2.3.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools.....	42
2.3.6 Planned use of financial instruments	42
2.3.7 Indicative breakdown of EU programme resources by type of intervention	42
2.4 Title of PRIORITY 4 (IS01) - An area of cooperation with better governance between Italy and Malta.....	42
2.4.1 Specific objective 4.1 (d) - Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of cooperation in the cross-border area.....	42
2.4.2 Related types of actions and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate.....	43
2.4.3 Indicators.....	43
2.4.4 Main target group.....	44
2.4.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the intended use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools.....	44

2.4.6 Planned use of financial instruments	44
2.4.7 Indicative breakdown of EU programme resources by type of intervention	44
3. Financing plan	46
3.1 Financial appropriations by year	46
3.2 Total financial appropriations by fund and national co-financing.....	46
4. Actions taken to involve the relevant programme partners in the preparation of the Interreg programme and the role of those programme in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation.....	48
5. Approach to communication and visibility for the Interreg programme (objectives, target audiences, communication channels, including social media outreach, where appropriate, planned budget and relevant indicators for monitoring and evaluation)	50
6. Indication of support for small-scale projects, including small projects within small project funds	51
7. Implementing provisions	52
7.1 Programme authorities.....	52
7.2 Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat.....	53
7.3 Apportionment of liabilities among participating Member States and where applicable, the third or partner countries and OCTs, in the event of financial corrections imposed by the managing authority or the Commission	54
8. Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs	55
Annex 1	56
Annex 2	57
Appendix 3	57
Annex 3	57

ATTACHMENT

TEMPLATE FOR INTERREG PROGRAMMES

CCI	[15 characters]
Title	INTERREG VI-A Italia-Malta
Version	
First year	[4]
Last year	[4]
Eligible from	
Eligible until	
Commission decision number	
Commission decision date	
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NUTS regions covered by the programme	ITG11 - Trapani ITG12 - Palermo ITG13 - Messina ITG14 - Agrigento ITG15 - Caltanissetta ITG16 - Enna ITG17 - Catania ITG18 - Ragusa ITG19 - Siracusa MT001 - Malta MT002 - Gozo and Comino / Għawdex u Kemmuna
Strand	A

1. Joint programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

1.1 Programme area (not required for Interreg C programmes)

Reference: point (a) of Article 17(3), point (a) of Article 17(9) [2 000]

Located in the middle of the Mediterranean, the cooperation area covered by the Italia-Malta Programme has not registered any enlargement since the Commission's Implementing Decision of 16 June 2014 (For Italy: Sicily - Nuts Zones 3: Palermo, Trapani, Caltanissetta, Agrigento, Ragusa, Siracusa, Enna, Catania and Messina; for Malta: the entire Maltese territory).

The cooperation area involves territories that are different from each other in institutional nature (a Region and a State), extension and population density (on the one hand, Sicily represents the largest Italian region and the largest island in the Mediterranean, on the other, Malta is the smallest and most densely populated EU Member State).

The eligible geographical area covered by the Programme is 26,148 square kilometres, of which 25,832 square kilometres correspond to the Sicilian territory and 316 square kilometres represent the entire Maltese territory.

As of 1 January 2020, the resident population in the area amounted to 5,482,974 units (Source:

Eurostat), of which 514,564 units for Malta (Source: NSO) and 4,968,410 units for Sicily (Source: Istat).

As for the geographical, natural, and physical characteristics, in Sicily the hilly terrain prevails, while the Maltese territory is characterized by plains and rocky coasts. Due to its geographical location, the cooperation area is home to a significant natural and environmental heritage.

The area covered by the programme is strongly influenced by its insular nature, which contributes to accentuating its peripheral position with respect to the center of gravity of the European Union, to which is added the double insularity that characterizes the smaller islands.

1.2 Joint programme strategy: Summary of main joint challenges, taking into account economic, social and territorial disparities as well as inequalities, joint investment needs and complimentary and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments, lessons-learned from past experience and macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies where the programme area as a whole or partially is covered by one or more strategies. Reference: point (b) of Article 17(3), point (b) of Article 17(9)

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[50 000]

Common challenges in view of economic, social and territorial disparities and inequalities

The overall economic framework of the cross-border area in 2015-2017 shows a growth of 17% of GDP in Malta, ten times greater than in Sicily in the same period (1.8%) which highlights a clear disparity in terms of economic development between the two territories.

Sicily continues to encounter difficulties in recovering from the fall in gross domestic product (GDP) suffered between 2008 and 2014, outlining a slower growth path than that of the Mezzogiorno (South of Italy) and Italy. For Sicily, among other things, the positive trend that began in 2015 has progressively weakened in the following three years (Servizio Statistica ed Analisi Economica della Regione Siciliana - Statistical Service and Economic Analysis of the Sicilian Region, 2019). At the end of the recession in 2011, however, the Maltese economic growth rate began to grow progressively, ranking first in 2014 (surpassing even the Baltic countries) and remaining in second place, at 159.3 in 2018, just behind the Irish economy.

At the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak hit the economy of all European countries hard. After falling by 3.7% in the first quarter, euro area GDP fell by 11.8% in the second.

The SVIMEZ regional forecasts for 2020 profile for Sicily a loss of GDP in 2020 of -6.9%; the restart for 2021 also appears to be slowed down (+0.7%).

The Regional Competitiveness Index (RCI) shows that the cross-border area performs below the EU average, with Malta reaching 95% and Sicily 61% of the EU average. However, it should be noted that although it is below the EU average, the Maltese competitiveness index compared to the EU average in the period 2016-2019, has risen from 85% of the average in 2016 to 95% of the average in 2019.

Research & Innovation, Digitalization

The data of the Regional Innovation Scoreboard – RIS 2019 confirm that Sicily is considered a "moderate innovator", that is, among those who have a performance between 50% and 95% of the EU average, with an R&D expenditure of companies that can be summarized in -48% of the Italian average and -60% of the European average; where patent applications represent -64% of the Italian average and -75% of the European average and where the number of employees in high-tech sectors are -3.5% of the Italian average and -4.1% of the European average and internet access for families corresponds to -9% of the Italian average and 74% of the European average.

Malta is also considered a "moderate innovator" given the fragmented nature of R&I policy instruments and the need for greater investment in research, development and innovation by the public and private sectors to ensure the future prosperity of the country; in addition, the lack of a channel for the competitive funding of basic and applied research is noted; there is a reduced

representativeness of the relevant actors in the research and innovation system: businesses, higher education institutions, public research organisations and civil society and households' internet access is 85% of the European average.

In the territorial area, the key role of the Sicilian and Maltese Universities (UNIPA, UNICT, UNIKORE, UNIME, UoM, MCAST) as central players in the R&I system of the two countries is underlined. Important Sicilian actors in the sector are represented by the Etna Valley, Catania Ricerche, Etna Hitech (EHT), the Sicily Micro and Nano Systems Technological District, NAVTEC, Agro-bio – Eco-compatible Fishing. For Malta, research and innovation have been placed at the top of the national agenda of the Government which, to achieve the goals of Horizon 2020, has committed itself with the European Commission to revise upwards the R&D target up to 2% of GDP. A particularly interesting fact is that on the participation in the Horizon 2020 programme in Sicily and Malta. Compared to the HORIZON 2020 programme there is a great participation both in Sicily and in Malta by universities, university consortia, public bodies and innovative private companies. At the top of the organizations that benefit from Horizon funding are universities and university consortia, but also public institutions (especially in the Maltese case) and innovative private companies. As far as the production system is concerned, there is in Sicily the presence of ICT Clusters, that of Catania specialized in equipment and equipment for telecommunications, computers and office equipment and that of Palermo focused on software design and development and telecommunications. However, such a system is not able to absorb the supply of qualified human resources with the significant impact in terms of inefficient use of human capital. Conversely, for Malta, the driving role of SMEs is confirmed, but they are faced with rationing problems for qualified staff and experienced managers.

The main **challenges of the cooperation programme** are oriented to:

- promote the growth and competitiveness of MSMEs in the area and foster technology transfer in areas of interest such as the green and blue economy, circular economy, health and quality of life, etc., but also the cultural and creative industry, social enterprises, etc. that ensures forms of development and sustainable growth.
- contribute to the broadening of the base of operators able to grasp and further develop the potential deriving from advanced technologies in areas of mutual interest such as the green and blue economy, the circular economy, health and quality of life, etc. but also cultural and creative industry, social enterprises etc.

Environment, Climate, Risks

Data from the analysis of the area show a predominance in the use of non-renewable resources for electricity production and heat production in both territories, although the current share of renewable energy in energy production and consumption is higher than the EU average. The share in Italy is 18.1% and in Malta 5.3%.

As far as Biodiversity is concerned, in the cross-border area there is an invaluable environmental and naturalistic heritage with a large number of Natura 2000 sites and nationally designated protection areas, several "Ramsar" sites (wetland site of international importance) and several areas classified as "high" in the Wilderness Quality Index. However, this is combined with a high presence of invasive alien plant species (more than 5%) that threaten the biodiversity existent in the cross-border area and the presence of polluted areas due to various factors, which also include the presence of micro-plastics along the coastal areas (marine litter), a risk factor for the survival of the ecosystems existing in the cooperation area. In addition, the cross-border area is characterized by coastal areas subject to strong anthropogenic pressures and risks deriving from the resident population, the tourism sector, the presence of ports with high maritime traffic, but also from desalination plants and fish farms.

In the cross-border area there is yet a marked vulnerability of the coastal territories as they are subject to erosion, hydrogeological instability and flooding of the coastal strip, as well as the spread

of alien species determined by climate change and the radicalization of the impact of atmospheric agents. The central Mediterranean area is known to be a hotspot for climate change and both the Maltese and Sicilian coasts are subject to negative effects, so the need for the development and enhancement of a comprehensive and interdisciplinary assessment of climate vulnerability and exposure risk for specific local contexts is unprecedented.

With regard to the potential of the circular economy, in the area there is a low percentage of municipal waste subject to separate collection and recycling and consequent poor application of the principle of the "waste hierarchy". In fact, the incidence of waste disposal in landfills remains too high in the area; in Sicily these levels remain higher than the national average, while in Malta, they have recorded a progressive improvement since 2018, with a significant decrease in mixed waste in favor of biodegradable waste. This following the adoption of a regulatory package on waste recycling with a view towards a circular economy and the adoption in 2021 of the new "Waste Package" or the "Long Term Waste Management Plan 2021-2030" with its onerous and ambitious objectives such as: Innovate by designing waste prevention initiatives to lower the per capita production rate; reform the collection system; build the waste management facilities necessary for the treatment of recyclable, organic and residual waste. However, phenomena such as marine litter underline how innovative solutions in the field of circular economy and green economy are not yet widespread and consolidated.

The cross-border area also has a clear sensitivity to *climate change*. The cooperation area is characterized by a predominantly dry Mediterranean climate, with hot and very long summers, mild and rainy winters and very variable intermediate seasons. However, in recent decades, a phenomenon of climate radicalization has occurred, the effect of which has been a shift towards a temperate subtropical climate with rising temperatures, progressive sea level rise and coastal erosion. Among the consequences of this phenomenon there is the loss of beach surface and the increase in the vulnerability of coastal territories to adverse weather and sea events such as, for example, large storm surges that cause flooding and coastal erosion. This has, in some cases, resulted in an almost total loss of entire sandy beaches in Malta, considering that Malta does not have very large beaches in its territory. Most of its pocket beaches, which comprise a very small percentage of the total coastline (less than 5%) are also relatively small in size and any loss of beach area has a very significant impact on the socioeconomic and ecological amenity of these environments. There is a high level of interest in the protection, supply and creation of sandy beaches because of their economic importance for the tourism sector, which supports the economy. The dynamics of the coastal slopes, which affect both Sicily and Malta, includes phenomena of intense erosion with mass movements linked to landslides, collapses, debris flows and complex processes of hydrogeological instability. Both Malta and Sicily have knowledge and data gaps that need to be filled to address these issues holistically and develop strategic and sustainable solutions for their territories. This was also one of the obstacles to a more effective implementation of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Protocol in the territories of Malta and Sicily. There is a gap between science and policy, which hinders the implementation of an ICZM process. In addition, ineffective or totally absent coordination between local, regional and national authorities in both territories creates administrative obstacles. There is no comprehensive strategy that could require a regional plan for the sustainable development of the coastal areas of these territories. This can compensate for the defects of national planning on both sides of the Maltese and Sicilian coasts. Innovative approaches, developed through shared knowledge and experience, could also set an example for more holistic approaches in each country. Intensive land use, heavy landscape modification and dense urbanisation in specific coastal areas of the territories of Malta and Sicily create conditions of environmental degradation and highlight the risk of erosion in coastal areas, increased vulnerability and exposure to climate change and the need to develop regional strategies and policy coherence.

Another element of risk for the cooperation area is represented by seismic hazard. The Maltese

Islands and Sicily are both situated at the centre of the Mediterranean region wherein lies an extensive fault system, which affects the whole region from Sicily to Tunisia. Some of the faults are still active and are responsible for the geomorphological and tectonic development of the Maltese Islands, which are part of the Pantelleria Rift, also known as the Sicily Channel Rift Zone (SCRZ). Three out of the five highest magnitude earthquakes experienced in Malta between 1542 and present day (1542, 1693, 1743, 1856 and 1911) had an epicenter located in the Malta-Sicily channel. Both Malta and Sicily have densely populated areas and numerous historical buildings of significant heritage value. There is much scope for strengthening and fostering cooperation on studies for a more comprehensive assessment of seismic vulnerabilities for each territory, drawing upon the data and knowledge from the wider region. This can be built on the already existing ad-hoc collaboration that exists between the University of Malta and the Gruppo Sismica and University of Catania, who have provided the mathematical engineering of software programmes used by Gruppo Sismica, that has at times made their software available to the University of Malta for research in the local context. Malta does not have enough data from damages to buildings from previous earthquakes as much as Sicily and Italy. The building stock of certain heritage buildings (e.g. churches, cathedrals, other edifices) have close similarities in their form of construction used across territories, where historically the building expertise of Maltese 'periti' was quite often received from Sicily and Italy. Therefore, there is scope and potential for cross-border transferability and replicability of knowledge and experience to provide a common approach to risk assessment. This political and technical cooperation will be beneficial to both territories in mitigation against seismic risks common to both and which emanate from a common underlying geohazard phenomenon that also connects Malta and Sicily subliminally in the geophysical sense.

Another related impact is that of any seismic activity which results in tsunami events. This is also particularly significant and noteworthy in the central Mediterranean and especially in the cooperation area, due to the high population density of the Sicilian and Maltese coasts, the significant levels of maritime traffic, the intense port activities and the presence of numerous coastal infrastructures. Investing in the planning and management of the various risk scenarios of the coastal area of the Italia-Malta area represents a major challenge of the cooperation programme. Similar collaboration can be achieved in this area which can also be identified as a specific thematic issue of interest and benefit for research institutions in Malta and Sicily.

In the environmental field, the main **challenges of the cooperation programme** are oriented towards:

- mitigate the effects of climate change and anthropogenic impacts on the land-sea system and to improve the adaptability of systems, human institutions and other organisms in response to adverse events of a natural type or resulting from human activities in such a way as to reduce negative alterations;
- reduce the negative impacts of waste and tourism on the environment by promoting the transition to a circular economy in which the value of products, materials and resources is preserved for as long as possible in the economy and the generation of waste and pollution is minimized;
- safeguard areas with high value or potential for biodiversity, ensuring forms of strict protection aimed at leaving natural processes substantially intact to respect the ecological needs of the area but which nevertheless allow the use by the population and the enhancement for tourist and economic purposes.

Transport

The area is characterized by a high presence of ports that manage the traffic of goods and passengers both in the Mediterranean area and to non-EU countries.

In relation to maritime transport, the Sicilian ports affected by freight traffic to and from Malta are

Catania, Augusta, Pozzallo and Gela. Gela and Augusta are part of the TEN trans-European network.

There are four Maltese ports: Valletta, Marsaxlokk, Cirkewwa and Mgarr, which are part of the Maltese network "TEN-T"

Among the different ports that handle passenger traffic two of them (Messina and Gozo / Cirkewwa) are among the top 20 passenger ports in Europe. For both Sicily and Malta, the majority of sea passengers (95%) are non-cruise passengers

Taking into account both the lack of substantial financial resources and the critical issues on the matter of accessibility and infrastructure endowment, it is highlighted how, due to its complexity and breadth, this issue will be treated by other resources since, for the 21-27 programme it will not be possible to activate concrete actions on the theme of transport and accessibility that allow to make critical mass.

Employment, Inclusion, Health

The employment level of the cooperation area with specific reference to indicators related to youth employment, people living in a family with very low work intensity, unemployment, long-term unemployment, labour productivity and wages shows that the cooperation area is below the EU averages, with Malta performing better than Sicily.

In 2018, the employment rate in the Italy-Malta area is 56.05%, for people aged 15-64, compared to an EU average of 69%. Malta has a rate of 71.4% and Sicily 40.7%. The overall unemployment rate in Sicily is 21.5% while Malta is at 3.7%, with an EU average of 6.9% (2018). Unemployment in Sicily mainly affects young people with high educational qualifications. The Covid-induced crisis has made the employment structure of the Region even more fragile, causing recruitment data to collapse. The employment dynamics in Malta are constantly developing, also linked to the influx of workers from abroad, with an average annual rate of 6.4% in 2019 although the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic must be taken into due consideration. The rate of working population in the labour market with a low level of education is lower than the EU average.

The school dropout rate in Sicily and Malta is higher than the EU average of 9.9%. However, Malta has experienced a steady year-on-year decline in early school leaving from education and training from 21.4% in 2010 to 12.6% in 2020. Sicily has a particularly high rate of people with a low level of education (48.6%). Secondary post-mandatory education institutions and higher education institutions play an increasing role in creating a highly skilled workforce as well as in referring low-skilled people and offering accredited courses to "non-employed, education or training" (NEETS).

The non-profit sector offers, both in Sicily and Malta, an important contribution to the functioning and expansion of the offer in the Health and Social Care sectors, alongside the public and profit sectors. The collaboration in the health sector between the two territories has already successfully tested models that apply innovative solutions of health services, while promoting the exchange of health data through IT systems.

In the non-profit sector, social innovation has also taken on an important role in stimulating economic growth and addressing social issues in a sustainable way at a very difficult time for economies affected by the Covid-19 epidemic. The lack of financial capacity and human resources of non-profit companies represents a major obstacle that organizations have to face. In the area of cooperation, there is also an opportunity to activate cooperation networks on the creation of innovative services at cross-border level in order to strengthen social organizations.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on cultural heritage and tourism. The scenarios for the immediate future profile the possibility of a two-year period for recovery. However, given the importance of tourism for both countries, it is necessary to adapt the tourist offer through the development of joint initiatives in this area, considering the specific needs of both islands. Sustainability becomes a priority value and a transversal axis for the tourist development of destinations linked to health security and the healthiness of the environment.

The main **challenge of the cooperation programme** is to:

- enhance the theme of "usability for all" of cultural and natural heritage assets by experimenting with solutions that allow the regeneration of spaces and the revitalization of places of culture to promote initiatives in the cultural and creative field with the aim of inclusion and economic growth.

All cooperation actions implemented under the programme will respect the horizontal principles. In the context of all programmes' axes and in particular in the selection criteria of future call for proposals for the projects financing, an evaluation criterion related to the compliance with the horizontal principles referred to in art. 9 of Reg. (EU) 2021/1060 (RDC) and art. 22(2) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 will be included. In addition, projects under SO 1 and SO 4 are expected to also actively promote the rights of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, equality between men and women, and prevention of any discrimination based on gender, race, age, health, nationality or ethnicity and including accessibility.

The programme significantly contributes to the objectives related to the environment and the climate provided for art. 6 of CPR. Based on the principle of thematic concentration, 45% of the programme's resources are mobilized for the strategic objective "A greener Europe". Reflecting the importance of tackling climate change in line with the Union's commitments to implement the Paris Agreement adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the programme's funds will allocate an overall target of 41,36% of the Union contribution to expenditure supported for the achievement of the climate objectives set for the Union budget. Furthermore, reflecting the importance of tackling the loss of biodiversity, the programme's funds will allocate the target of 18% of budget expenditure to contribute to mainstream biodiversity action in the Union policies.

Among other things, the programme is following with interest the initiative the "new European Bauhaus" and its implication for the "Green Deal" and intends to promote its content, where appropriate.

During the implementation of the Programme the Managing Authority intends to promote the strategic use of public procurement to support Policy Objectives (including professionalization efforts to address capacity gaps). Beneficiaries should be encouraged to use more quality-related and lifecycle cost criteria. When feasible, environmental (e.g. green public procurement criteria) and social considerations, as well as innovation incentives, should be incorporated into public procurement procedures.

In line with art. 69 paragraph 8 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, the Program will ensure that all exchanges of information between the beneficiaries and the programme's authorities will be carried out through an information system for the exchange of data in accordance with Annex XIV.

The system for the management, monitoring and control of the program will aim to use logical functionalities and a simple and intuitive interface. The functions of the system will include a) interactive forms and / or forms pre-filled by the system on the basis of the archived data; b) automatic calculations, where relevant; c) integrated automatic controls; d) alerts generated by the system to notify the beneficiary of the possibility of carrying out certain actions; e) online traceability of the status of the project useful for the beneficiary to follow its progress; f) a repository for archiving documents.

The information system will ensure record keeping and data retention in order to allow for administrative checks of the requests for reimbursement submitted by beneficiaries in accordance with Article 74 (2) and audits. It will also support the program authorities for the transmission of financial data.

An effective electronic exchange of data makes it possible, in fact, to significantly reduce the administrative burdens for the beneficiaries and for the programme's authorities.

Data will be transferred only once and will always be available to the programme's authorities.

The electronic submission of data will save time and storage space and will contribute to the principle of environmental sustainability. The sender of the information can be easily identified in the system and therefore the data provided by the beneficiary will be considered valid. Eliminating the paper flow will contribute to the provision of data only once by making it available to all bodies involved in management, implementation, monitoring, control and audit.

Interoperability will be guaranteed through the involvement of all institutions involved in the implementation, ensuring the exchange and reuse of data and information.

Finally, the electronic data exchange system will guarantee the integrity and confidentiality of the data and the authentication of the sender.

Complementarity and synergies with other programmes

The cooperation programme shall identify common solutions to common problems identified as priorities for strengthening the territorial cohesion of the area.

Building on the experience of the previous programming period, the Programme focuses on a limited number of objectives where cross-border cooperation can make a difference and ensure sustainable growth and development (environment, risk management, sustainable tourism, innovation and competitiveness).

The challenge of the Italia-Malta programme is the sound management, protection and enhancement of the maritime space that touches the cooperation area while contributing to the social and economic growth of the territories.

Given the modest financial appropriation, in order to maximise the effect of interventions in the maritime area, it will be necessary to ensure coordination with the main mainstream programmes of Malta and Italy.

The absence of territorial contiguity within the cooperation area has obvious repercussions on the type of cooperation actions that can be activated and consequently on the potential complementarities and synergies that can be established with the mainstream programmes, respectively of Sicily and Malta.

The link between mainstream and ETC programmes is very important for strengthening access to transnational networks of regional innovation systems and for fostering brain circulation and/or the joint training of researchers and operators with high technological specialization.

In this perspective, the opportunity offered by ETC allows a greater international openness to innovation policies in the framework of possible synergies between areas /trajectories of smart specialization identified within the respective RIS3.

The ETC instrument is also particularly suitable for addressing environmental issues that often go beyond regional/national administrative boundaries.

With regard to water resources and the circular economy, the regional/national intervention of the respective Member States aims at a predominantly structural approach. In this case, the ability of the Cooperation Programme to operate through the implementation of material interventions appears substantially limited, if not marginally through the implementation of pilot interventions that in this case should be clearly distinguished from the business as usual. In this perspective, it seems more reasonable that the intervention of the Italia Malta programme targets initiatives that do not relate to the core business of public action in these areas, but rather focus on collateral actions (e.g. minimization / waste treatment in economic sectors of common interest) that can actively contribute to the achievement of the objectives of overall policies on the management of water resources and waste through the capitalization on a larger scale.

With reference to the theme of risk prevention and adaptation to climate change, the

regional/national intervention provides for numerous actions on which it is possible to envisage a complementarity between the cooperation programme and the Sicilian and Maltese mainstream programmes, which in particular may concern: strengthening the decision support systems of the regional civil protection system, studies on modelling for hydraulic risk warning, experimental studies of coastal vulnerability for risk prevention, environmental control and monitoring for civil protection purposes, improvement of emergency planning and regional response capacity during the event. In these areas, potential complementarities are highlighted, also at the level of institutional cooperation, which are not envisaged in a minor form in relation to structural interventions. On these aspects, the Italia-Malta Programme has already carried out several initiatives whose results will have to be systematized and possibly capitalized also at an institutional level.

With reference to the protection and conservation of the natural heritage and biodiversity, there is full convergence in relation to the Integrated Program for Biodiversity and the renewal of economic activities in areas of naturalistic value that specifically intercepts both maritime and terrestrial spaces. In this context, there appears to be space for potential collaborations in synergy with the interventions that are envisaged within the PO4. Moreover, in terms of conservation and protection of biodiversity, one of the most important cross-border aspects is the ecological value of the marine area of the Strait of Sicily / Channel of Sicily whose ecosystem must also be protected through coordinated interventions within each respective Member State that act both on the protection of the life cycles of endogenous species and on the prevention / mitigation of pollution caused by human activities.

With regard to the enhancement of heritage (cultural and natural) and tourism, the Programme can play a particularly significant role in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation, in full synergy with the policies implemented by the respective Member States. Both Sicily and Malta have a cultural and environmental heritage that make them attractive destinations for a considerable number of tourists, but at the same time the sector suffers from partially shared criticalities and common challenges that can be addressed on the basis of a common approach.

Moreover, tourism has been one of the economic sectors that has suffered most from the consequences of Covid-19 and both Sicily and Malta have suffered heavy reductions in visitor flows as a result of the travel restrictions imposed in the initial phase of the pandemic. Net of a partial recovery of the sector, that also took place on the impulse of the vaccination campaign, the methods of use of the places and in general the social interactions continue to be influenced by the persistence of a situation of not a full return to normality.

As reported in the Report on Italian participation in the ETC, NDICI and IPA 2014-2020 programmes by the Agenzia della Coesione Territoriale) Agency for Territorial Cohesion, the actions that in general have been concretely supported by the ETC and considered most relevant by the Regions concern the enhancement of cultural heritage - also through digitization - with attention to minor heritage and local production systems and jobs rooted in the territories; strengthening the role of cultural and creative industries in the processes of social innovation and the construction of new business models in tourism; the elaboration of action plans and guidelines for the strengthening of cultural and tourist itineraries; the innovative development of synergies between historical, cultural and naturalistic heritage in territories that share the same identity; the creation of tourist packages with the direct involvement of local communities; the homogenization of tourist reception standards; the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism infrastructure, starting from ports; the impact of tourism on the territory and communities and the management of *over tourism* phenomena.

In this framework, the Italia-Malta Programme could serve as a platform for testing actions that could then be subsequently replicated on a larger scale within mainstream programmes aimed at exploiting the economic potential of tourism and culture to reduce disparities, promote convergence and contribute to the economic recovery of territories. The tourism sector has the potential to promote socio-economic development and non-discrimination by creating employment and

entrepreneurship opportunities aimed at social inclusion, breaking down barriers to inequality and improving the living conditions of communities.

In addition, the effects of climate change – that already have in part – may increasingly have important consequences in the future on coastal tourism in the cooperation area. In this perspective, the Programme could support mainstream programming through pilot interventions to integrate the tourist offer through the integration between the coast and inland areas to overcome the linked to local approach of individual tourist destinations, ensure that people with disabilities or in situations of reduced mobility acquire skills, participate in cultural life and contribute to creative industries through the promotion and promotion of the development of cultural spaces, technologies and inclusive learning programs.

In order to ensure the desired social spill-over effects, the involvement of all potential stakeholders is necessary. This would make it possible to differentiate the product portfolio and the type of product to be offered. This is a prerequisite for creating synergies that would ensure adequate investment in tourism, in terms of retraining and specialization of the actors involved.

From this point of view, the Italy-Malta Programme could also be functional to the definition of strategies and feasibility studies that also identify the light infrastructures (paths and support tools for the disabled, regeneration and promotion of cultural spaces, etc.) that are necessary to develop forms of integrated sea-inland areas tourism.

For Malta as for Sicily, cooperation with other Mediterranean maritime cross-border programmes (e.g. Italia-Tunisia, Italia-France "Maritime") or transnational (e.g. INTERREG Euro-MED and Next Med) on joint or parallel projects can lead to better and more sustainable results, improve knowledge transfer and increase the cross-border impact of cooperation. In this direction also goes the will of Italy-Malta to participate in the experimentation of a multi-program coordination mechanism (enhanced cooperation) with other Interreg programmes in the Mediterranean and, in particular, with the pioneering programmes of the mechanism such as Italy-France Maritime, NEXT MED and Euro-MED, through a possible flagship on sustainable tourism and / or any other sector of interest for the programme. Such experimentation would be also useful for its contribution to the implementation of the relevant priorities of WestMED, Strategy for the Mediterranean Sea Basin, of which Malta and Italy are members.

In this regard, the WestMED initiative represents the natural strategic-political reference for the definition of intervention priorities that intercept the maritime component of territorial development policies. The aim of the initiative is to promote sustainable blue growth and employment, improve security and preserve ecosystems and biodiversity in the western Mediterranean through coordination and cooperation between the participating countries, including Italy and Malta, but also Tunisia. The areas of interest intercepted by the Programme concern the following strategic objectives of the WESTMED Initiative: Goal 1: A safer and more secure maritime space; Goal 2: A smart and resilient blue economy; Goal 3: Better governance of the sea.

Coordination with WestMED will be ensured through the implementation of complementary themes (e.g. biodiversity protection, maritime safety, blue economy) or the implementation of shared initiatives (e.g. joint thematic events, capitalisation of results).

The modalities will be shared according to the state of implementation of the programs through any integration processes not yet foreseen or debated.

Finally, the objectives of the programme are also largely synergistic with the EUSAIR macro-regional strategy, partially concerned for the Italian part, where there is a clear convergence with the specific objectives related to risk management and biodiversity, as well as with the specific objectives related to the improvement of skills, training and promotion of cultural heritage for the benefit of sustainable tourism.

Lessons learned

Research and Innovation

The Italy-Malta programme in the 2014-2020 programming period was strongly oriented towards supporting the EU 2020 strategy and to achieve this objective, in a logic of thematic concentration. It decided to operate on some issues of the RIS3 of the Sicilian Region and the Republic of Malta in order to guide the leverage effect of the actions of the programme. For this reason, the following areas of specialization (Key enabling Technologies - KETs) have been identified for the cooperation area. In particular: 1) Electronics, 2) Mechatronics, 3) Micro and Nanosystems, 4) Biotechnology and research applied to human health.

The areas of research and innovation, ensured with the operations planned under Axis I, have actively contributed to the achievement of the objective of "Increasing innovation and research activity for the improvement of the quality of life and the use of cultural heritage" ensuring, among other things, an integration between the scientific and economic worlds trying to ensure that the results of research in the areas of competence were placed on the market, thereby contributing to the creation of jobs and business opportunities. Through 33 beneficiaries, public-private partnerships were built with the participation of 9 companies, 8 public bodies and 16 public law bodies (universities and research centers).

However, the direct involvement of MSMEs in cooperation projects has in fact highlighted a real difficulty in linking virtuous and long-lasting processes linked both to the transfer of knowledge and to the enhancement of the results of the research itself. To be noted, as a factor of weakness, was also the poor ability to capitalize on experiences and solutions already tested in other contexts. The serious socio-economic and health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has certainly led to further obstacles and difficulties in achieving all the objectives planned on the Axis.

In summary, the main weaknesses that have characterized the implementation of Axis I are highlighted below:

- a) low interest of actors in the cooperation area in the activation of measures related to mobility and cross-border researcher exchanges to increase research and innovation capacity;
- b) weak performance of companies that have adopted innovative technologies and services created and developed by the main research poles and organizations in the area probably due to the different nature of the actions developed or the relatively low involvement of the main stakeholders / policy makers or the low involvement of citizens users of these technologies;
- c) Weak ability to capitalize, integrate and coordinate in cross-border projects the R&I results obtained with other sources of funding;
- d) Poor coordination of (public) research organisations to guide research and innovation challenges in a concentrated and coordinated manner in order to orient them to meet the needs of businesses and citizens.

Competitiveness

In close coordination with the strategic structure of Axis I and with the same technologically advanced sectors, Axis II of the programme cycle 14-20 has also set an objective linked to the growth of the competitiveness of MSMEs through the promotion of entrepreneurship, employment and mobility of workers in the following sectors: protection of the environment and quality of life and health of citizens. Although the activation of projects that promote mobility has resulted in a very high level of satisfaction and participation among young unemployed people in the Sicilian area, no such interest has emerged in the Maltese area due to the very low levels of unemployment. However, the vocation of the Maltese territory to continue investing in the circulation of skills across borders remains strong.

Although with a fairly limited initial financial budget, the programme has achieved important results

related to the strengthening and encouragement of social innovation realities (co-working, fab-lab, etc.), the stimulation of social innovation paths in sectors such as Digital Health, Food Tech and Tourism and also the potential internationalization and consolidation of innovative MSMEs. Through the strengthening of their production of value, corporate responsibility and propensity to a sustainable, circular and green economy, it has been possible to enhance the complementarities and strengths of the development models of the two islands.

Taking into account the strong interest and needs of the beneficiaries of the area, Axis II has been reprogrammed in order to allocate more financial resources to allow the financing of over 200 mobility of young workers within the area through a voucher.

In summary, the main weaknesses that have characterized the implementation of Axis II are highlighted below:

- a) low involvement of institutional bodies of the area within cooperation projects in terms of competitiveness;
- b) difficulty/impossibility of launching a public notice for the selection of start-ups and spin-offs due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic that has heavily aggravated the fragile situation of the economy of the area;
- c) weak coordination of (successful) actions funded by the Italia-Malta programme on cross-border mobility of young people with the ESF programmes in the area.

Environment and risk management

With reference to Axis III of the Italia-Malta programme, in cycle 14-20 a very ambitious objective was set linked to the promotion and protection of the environment, climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity protection, disaster resilience, and risk prevention and management.

The funded operations have successfully ensured the achievement of all the proposed objectives with regard to the protection of marine and terrestrial biodiversity, to test pilot measures for risk prevention and management and resilience to disasters and finally to ensure a complex system of surveillance of marine weather conditions in order to provide a strong and resilient response to the effects of climate change. The lessons learned on operations financed under Axis III highlight the following weaknesses:

- a) lack of coordination with the actions planned by the ERDF programmes of both territories in the field of biodiversity and management of natural resources;
- b) low involvement and/or lack of awareness of policy makers responsible for the adoption of adequate governance tools;
- c) weak instruments for capitalizing on the results of the programme and/or coordinating all projects funded under the programme.

1.3 Justification for the selection of policy objectives and the Interreg-specific objectives, corresponding priorities, specific objectives and the forms of support, addressing, where appropriate, missing links in cross-border infrastructure

Reference: point (c) of Article 17(3)

Table 1

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
PO1-A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity	(i) developing and strengthening research and innovation capacities and the introduction of advanced technologies	1	<p>[2000]</p> <p>Territories within the programme area present common challenges and economic potential, which can be tackled together more effectively across national borders.</p> <p>The maritime border, the island size of the two territories of the programme, the limited total R&D spending, in particular in its private component, make it more difficult for SMEs to take full advantage of joint cross-border opportunities.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the cross-border dimension of small and medium-sized enterprises and social enterprises operating in the green and blue sectors and in all sectors indirectly linked to the maritime dimension, such as tourism, creative industries, systems for improving the quality of life, etc. has already been partly tested in the 2014-2020 programming cycle and represents an opportunity for joint growth of territories.</p> <p>However, a more forward-looking approach is adopted, developing and strengthening research and innovation capacities in mutual areas of interest such as marine and maritime, digital</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>technologies and climate change adaptation/mitigation.</p> <p>The programme has great potential to support the improvement of the framework conditions for the development of SMEs in the area by mutually enhancing the strengths of each territory to overcome their respective weaknesses.</p> <p>The form of support is grants.</p>
	(iv) developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship	1	<p>[2000]</p> <p>The degree of knowledge and competence of workers of enterprises affects the productivity and competitiveness of companies.</p> <p>Therefore, a significant challenge for the economy-labor system in Sicily and Malta is to support paths of strengthening human capital (upskill) and acquiring new skills (reskill) for SMEs, increasing the opportunity to exploit new advanced technologies (new KETs) and creating new opportunities for qualified work.</p> <p>Specific actions concentrated in the areas of smart specialisation identified by the respective Sicilian and Maltese strategies will be able to directly support Sicilian and Maltese MSMEs and the upskilling and reskilling of human capital in the sector of the economy of the sea as well as all the mutual areas of interest.</p> <p>The form of support is grants.</p>
PO 2- A greener, low-carbon transitioning	(iv) Promoting climate change	2	[2000]

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility	adaptation and disaster risk prevention, and resilience, taking into account eco-system-based approaches		<p>The area of the programme is threatened by natural and anthropogenic risks, which go beyond national borders.</p> <p>As evidenced by the territorial analysis, the direct or indirect consequences of climate change severely affect both territories of the area and can be addressed jointly more effectively.</p> <p>The entire area of the programme is subject to natural and man-made disasters: risks such as coastal erosion, floods, earthquakes, landslides, hydrocarbon spills into the sea, are just some of the most important threats. Also, water scarcity and droughts are a major issue in the centre of the Mediterranean, whose impacts affect both the natural heritage and the economic activities of the area.</p> <p>Innovative technologies and practices can be tested to detect, monitor and mitigate such risks, as well as be shared across national borders to ensure more effective management of the cooperation area.</p> <p>Several partners consulted during the drafting of the programme stressed that cooperation in the field of risk management is a fundamental need of the territories and at the same time represents one of the areas where the benefits of cooperation are most evident.</p> <p>The lessons learned in 2014-2020 also show that in these issues partnerships have been able to achieve sustainable results: local communities have been able to effectively increase their ability to predict, monitor, prevent and respond to risks, including through strategic projects and common investments, digital and</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>physical</p> <p>The form of support is grants.</p>
	(vi) promoting the transition to a circular and resource-efficient economy	2	<p>[2000]</p> <p>The transition to the circular economy has a central role in the fight against climate change: increasing the rate of circularity will reduce the consumption of material and consequently cut global greenhouse gas emissions, thus contributing to the zero emissions target by 2050.</p> <p>The policies of the two Member States will act through structural interventions aimed on the one hand at preventing the generation of waste and transforming it into high-quality secondary resources and, on the other, at acting upstream to promote the spread of increasingly sustainable products.</p> <p>The objective of achieving a circular economic model can also be pursued thanks to the contribution of non-structural interventions, but of international scope, which integrate and support national / regional policies through the awareness of the actors operating along economic chains of common interest and / or the experimentation of innovative pilot management initiatives, recovery, and reuse of waste.</p> <p>The form of support is grants.</p>
	(vii) Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution	2	<p>[2000]</p> <p>The environment of the cross-border area faces common challenges, which transcend national borders.</p> <p>The Mediterranean Sea represents the maritime border of the programme and can only be effectively protected through joint and integrated actions.</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>As evidenced by the territorial analysis, the direct or indirect consequences of climate change and human activities on ecosystems have severely affected the territories of the area.</p> <p>At the same time, the territories share a rich natural heritage, which also presents great socio-economic potential, if exploited sustainably.</p> <p>The protection of natural heritage and biodiversity therefore recalls the need for a cross-border vision. This approach takes into account the existence of a land-sea continuum that requires a coordinated intervention by a plurality of institutional subjects belonging to different territorial systems.</p> <p>A joint effort is needed to protect fragile marine and coastal ecosystems as well as groundwater dependent ecosystems through the sustainable management and use of nature to address socio-environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, human health and environmental disaster risk management.</p> <p>Several partners consulted during the drafting of the programme stressed that cooperation on "green" issues is a fundamental need, especially with regard to the protection of natural habitats, both terrestrial and marine. New forms of "green" economic development and tourism services have the potential to mitigate or redirect the pressure of human activities on the coastal environment of the area.</p> <p>The lessons learned in 2014-2020 show that in these issues the partnerships have been able to achieve sustainable results: local communities have addressed the protection of natural habitats and identified</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>management models whose potential in terms of sustainable tourism can be encouraged with the new actions of the programme.</p> <p>The form of support is grants.</p>
<p>PO 4- more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights</p>	<p>(vi) Strengthening the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>[2000]</p> <p>Culture and tourism are a key factor for the economic development of the cross-border area and investments in these sectors generate clear added value along the entire value chain.</p> <p>During the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, these sectors have had to suffer long suspensions of activities, which will certainly have serious socio-economic impacts in the medium and long term, especially on employment rates.</p> <p>On the other hand, the crisis can also turn into an opportunity for transformation of these sectors, if investments are strategically oriented.</p> <p>The new challenges faced by the sector, including "safe destinations", require a different approach than in the past, based on the transformation brought about by COVID-19 and oriented towards more sustainable post-pandemic tourism.</p> <p>As highlighted by several partners during the public consultation, new opportunities and services are needed in these areas, e.g. for the most vulnerable social groups, such as the unemployed, young people, the elderly, vulnerable groups, women, the disabled, etc.</p> <p>As a result, it is necessary: 1) to invest in people's skills; 2) use/regenerate spaces and places making</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>them accessible to all; 3) create new opportunities for sustainable and digital development of tourism, creative industries and cultural sector, while involving local communities and vulnerable social groups.</p> <p>The form of support is grants.</p>
ISO 1 - Better cooperation governance	(d) enhance institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement macro-regional strategies and sea basin strategies, as well as other territorial strategies (all strands)	4	<p>[2000]</p> <p>The experience gained during the 2014-2020 programming period and the results of the consultation process with the main stakeholders of the area for the period 2012-27 have highlighted the real difficulty linked to multi-level coordination between all cross-border institutional actors in the knowledge and harmonized management of the various financing instruments in order to ensure integrated initiatives with high added value with a greater impact and efficiency for the territories themselves. Similarly, there is a weakness in the territorial system to integrate into the national agendas and mainstream programmes of both territories the good practices implemented in the context of cooperation in order to solve common problems by exploiting the synergies between the different programmes and projects.</p> <p>The cooperation area is also part of a vast geographical area of the Mediterranean that is of global strategic importance with a series of cross-border challenges that require joint and concerted strategic action. Multi-level cooperation between all cross-border actors is often hampered by disparities in institutional and administrative capacity and a non-homogeneous dimension of organisational models and levels of socio-economic development. Potential beneficiaries,</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>stakeholders and end-recipients of the programme that include a multitude of public and private entities have great potential to improve their efficiency, for example through greater simplification and harmonisation of procedures and through greater digitalisation for the benefit of citizens and SMEs.</p> <p>Consequently, it is necessary to ensure integration between ETC programming and mainstream programming to be pursued starting from the systematisation of the information capital already produced in the context of the projects carried out and in progress, preparatory, where appropriate, to their exploitation on a larger scale through cohesion policy resources. In this respect, the Programme should also activate appropriate instruments to capitalise on the results obtained with the operations of the current programming cycle in order to 1) Achieve additional results compared to those already achieved (ready-to-use), 2) Generate greater impact through the extension or replication of the experience (scaling up) and 3) Integrate the results within the policies and programmes (mainstreaming & embedding).</p> <p>The form of support is grants.</p>

2. Priority

Reference: points (d) and (e) of Article 17(3) [300]

2.1 Title of PRIORITY 1 (OS1) - A smarter area of cooperation to promote research and innovation and the development of skills for smart specialisation

Reference: point (d) of Article 17(3) [300]

2.1.1 Specific objective 1.1 (i) - Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies in the cross-border area

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3) [300]

2.1.2 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: points (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9) [7 000]

The strategy of the Programme aims to promote the growth and competitiveness of MSMEs in the area and to promote technology transfer in the thematic areas of as described in the respective Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3) documents (such as green and blue economy, circular economy, health and quality of life etc.) but also cultural and creative industry, social enterprises etc.) that ensures forms of development and sustainable growth.

Also because of its size, the actions that the programme plans to activate in PO 1 with reference to this specific objective are mainly of a "soft" nature, linked to the creation of networks and partnerships for the promotion of technological and non-tech innovation, as well as to the provision of technological transfer services. to MSMEs s transfer. They support and integrate the possible cooperation actions and structural interventions adopted by Sicily and Malta as part of their respective mainstream programmes.

In this logic, the types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH (Do No Significant Harm) principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

The actions that are planned to be activated in PO 1 with reference to this specific objective are:

- **Promotion of collaborative research (partnerships between companies and research centres)**

Interventions are planned to support networks between companies and specialized competence centers for the creation and testing of technological solutions in sectors or production chains in which a need for joint innovation emerges and/or for the experimentation of research interventions aimed at reducing climate-changing emissions (e.g: production of more environmentally friendly fuels, pilot projects of energy self-sufficiency in conditions of insularity, etc).

The evolution of the most promising research projects, based on TRLs, into marketable products is also supported.

- **Provision of advisory and innovation support services**

The action supports SMEs through assistance interventions in the field of knowledge transfer in order to promote the dissemination of innovative solutions and services for a better satisfaction of the economic, social and environmental needs of the area.

Support interventions for SMEs are envisaged through the acquisition of specialized assistance and "quick impact" services (also in the form of vouchers) for the introduction of innovations and eco-innovations based on a technological approach (e.g. digital transformation, technology transfer, etc.), but also to promote non-tech business innovations (e.g. scouting to support innovative business

ideas, (re)-organization of the company system, positioning on the markets and access to credit, etc.).

The programme's authorities during the implementation of this action will ensure adequate evaluation mechanisms of the project proposals in order to ensure compliance with the "durability" principle provided for the ECA report 2018 "EU support for productive investments in businesses - greater focus on durability needed". Therefore, although the action provides for the possibility of supporting SMEs with minor aids to incentivize the innovation, specific selection procedures and evaluation criteria will be applied so that the risk of deadweight loss is taken into account. This will ensure that potential beneficiaries - private entities cannot independently finance the projects and / or bear a higher percentage of the cost. Adequate management and monitoring mechanisms will also be provided in the call for proposals in order to highlight both the achievement of the results upon completion of the project and the durability of these results in the subsequent period.

These types of actions are integrated and contribute to the strategies for sea basins with particular reference to the WestMED initiative and to what the latter carries out through the Technical Group within the "green and sustainable shipping" area. In particular, as highlighted during the meeting held in March 2021 with the representatives of the Italian and Maltese national hubs, as well as with the national and regional authorities of the two Member States, the promotion of collaborative research carried out by the Italia Malta programme is integrated with the project ideas carried out within WestMed and in particular:

1. A feasibility study for alternative fuels for the western Mediterranean Sea basin with further potential studies at the level of individual southern countries. The study will also include an Observatory on technological supply chains on alternative fuels and sustainable energies in maritime transport, as a continuous update on the "state of the art" of the possible solutions to be adopted;
2. A pilot action for the creation of a network of WestMED seaports as energy communities within the subregion;
3. A pilot action to test the potential for renewal or adaptation of commercial fleets (ferries and services) to accelerate their transition to alternative fuels and technologies.

The type of actions in the programme also contribute to Pillar 1 of the EUSAIR strategy, in particular for blue technologies in SMEs and R&D activities for SMEs, but also in Pillar 4, new services for tourism SMEs through the promotion of cultural heritage.

2.1.3 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2
Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement Unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
1	1.1	RCO 01	Enterprises supported	Enterprises	0	15
1	1.1	RCO04	Enterprises with non-financial support	Enterprises	0	15
1	1.1	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	0	22

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement Unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
1	1.1	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solutions	0	5

Table 3
Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	1.1	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up scaled by organisations	Solutions	0	2022	5	Monitoring System	

2.1.4 Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9) [7 000]

With the aim of improving the growth and competitiveness of SMEs, the programme aims to support technology transfer and promote no-tech innovation in the productive fabric of the area, consisting mainly of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

MSMEs operating in areas of common cross-border interest are, therefore, the main target group. Support for competitiveness is expressed primarily through the involvement of actors (public and or private) who carry out research and support activities in the area on issues related to innovation, technology transfer, the development of innovative products and processes.

Given the type of actions listed above and the expected result, the Programme has identified the following main target groups:

- Local, regional, national authorities and other public institutions and agencies;
- Universities and research centers;
- Enterprises, including MSMEs;
- Business support organisations.

The target groups identified therefore include public and private stakeholders who will be involved or positively influenced by innovation actions and processes driven by smart specialisation strategies.

2.1.5 Indication of the specific targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article points (e)(iv) 17(3) [7 000].

The whole area of cooperation is affected by the actions envisaged in this specific objective.

2.1.6 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3) [7 000]

Not applicable

2.1.7 Indicative breakdown of EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(iv) of Article 17(3); point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4

Dimension 1 — Intervention field

Priority n.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.1	028-Technology transfer and cooperation between enterprises, research centres and the higher education sector	9.262.728

Table 5

Dimension 2 — Form of financing

Priority No.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.1	01	9.262.728

Table 6

Dimension 3 — Territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.1	33	9.262.728

2.1.8 Specific objective 1.2 (iv) - Develop skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship in the cross-border area

2.1.9 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

[7 000]

The strategy of the Programme intends to promote specific actions concentrated in the areas of smart specialization in Sicily and Malta as described in the respective Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3) documents to contribute to the enlargement of the base of operators who are able to grasp and further develop the potential deriving from advanced technologies in the sectors of mutual interest such as green and blue economy, circular economy, health and quality of life etc. but also cultural and creative industry, social enterprises etc.

Also because of its size, the actions that the programme plans to activate in OP 1 with reference to this specific objective are of a "soft" nature, mainly aimed at improving skills and their cross-border circulation. They support and integrate the possible cooperation actions and structural interventions adopted by Sicily and Malta as part of their respective mainstream programmes.

In this logic, the types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH (Do No Significant Harm) principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature,

The actions that are planned to be activated in PO 1 with reference to this specific objective are:

- **Qualification and mobility of human capital**

Interventions aimed at creating skills for the new generations of entrepreneurs, managers, researchers, technicians and operators in the sectors of mutual interest such as green and blue economy, circular economy, health and quality of life etc but also cultural and creative industry, social enterprises etc through cooperation with international and Mediterranean networks of knowledge, skills and abilities.

In this regard, as highlighted during the meeting held in March 2021 with the representatives of the Italian and Maltese national hubs, as well as with the national and regional authorities of the two Member States, the development of the so-called "blue skills" is another priority area of the WestMED initiative, completely complementary to the action of the Italia-Malta programme. Actions

in this area aim to respond to the common challenges of blue growth related mainly to climate change and sustainability, through cooperation with international and Mediterranean networks of knowledge, skills and abilities.

The type of actions of the programme also contribute to Pillar 1 of the EUSAIR strategy with particular reference to the issue of upskilling and capacity in the blue economy sector and to Pillar 4 with regard to increasing skills in the tourism sector.

Particularly in this specific objective, projects are expected to contribute to the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, to gender, age, ethnicity, health conditions equality and non-discrimination, as well as accessibility. Appropriate criteria shall be thus applied at the stage of project selection, monitoring and evaluation.

2.1.10 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17 (4) ; point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2
Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
1	1.2	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	0	14
1	1.2	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solutions	0	3

Table 3
Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of Data	Comments
1	1.2	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solutions	0	2022	3	Monitoring System	

2.1.11 Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

[7 000]

With the aim of expanding the knowledge and skills of the operators involved in the processes related to the so-called twin transition, the programme supports the human capital of the area and its specialization.

Given the type of actions listed above and the expected result, the Programme has identified the following main target groups:

- Local, regional, national authorities and other public institutions and agencies;
- Universities and research centers;

- Higher Technical Institutes ;
- Educational institutions of all levels;
- Enterprises, including MSMEs;
- Business support organisations.

The target groups identified therefore include public and private stakeholders who will be involved or positively influenced by innovation actions and processes driven by smart specialisation strategies.

2.1.12 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point(e)(iv) of 17(3) [7 000].

The whole area of cooperation is affected by the actions envisaged in this specific objective.

2.1.13 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3) [7 000]

Not applicable

2.1.14 Indicative breakdown of EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(iv) of Article 17(3); point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4

Dimension 1 — Intervention field

Priority n.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.2	023- - Development of skills for smart specialization, industrial transition, entrepreneurship and adaptability of enterprises to changes	4.562.239

Table 5

Dimension 2 — Form of financing

Priority No.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.2	01	4.562.239

Table 6

Dimension 3 — Territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.2	33	4.562.239

2.2 Title of PRIORITY 2 (OS2) A resilient cooperation area, which strengthens the protection and preservation of nature also through the efficient use of resource

Reference: Article 17(3)(d) [300]

2.2.1 Specific objective 2.1 (iv) - Promoting climate change adaptation, disaster risk prevention and resilience in the cross-border area

Reference: Article 17(3)(e) [300]

2.2.2 Related type of actions and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

[7 000]

In terms of adaptation to climate change, the Programme's strategy will promote actions aimed at strengthening risk prevention measures and responsiveness to adverse events with the aim of increasing the resilience of ecosystems and populations subject to natural and anthropogenic risks present in the cooperation area.

Also because of its size, the programme will mainly support non-structural measures that complement and integrate possible cooperation actions and the structural interventions adopted by Sicily and Malta.

In this logic, the types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH (Do No Significant Harm) principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

However, a selection criterion on the sustainable development is going to be applied in the project assessment falling within this kind of actions on the basis of measures adopted by the applicants, which potentially reduce negative environmental impacts.

The actions that are planned to be activated in PO 2 with reference to this specific objective are:

- **Integration, development, and research of multi-risk prevention processes**

Interventions aimed at the implementation of databases, the development of forecasting models in the climatic, meteorological, geomorphological, hydrological, seismic fields, the implementation of territorial analysis for risk studies and mitigation models are supported.

Interventions are planned aimed at defining local plans for adaptation to the consequences of climate change, including water scarcity and droughts, and emergency management (e.g. mapping of common climate profiles, joint plans based on similar climate and environmental issues, etc.) as well as actions to raise awareness of anthropogenic risks and deriving from climate change as well as capacity building actions for institutional and economic actors in the cross-border area.

- **Implementation of monitoring and alert systems**

This action aims to support interventions aimed at strengthening the knowledge system and the meteorological, geomorphological, hydrological, seismic, volcanic and environmental monitoring system as well as to ensure the interoperability of the systems between the two islands in the areas of environmental monitoring and safety.

In addition, capitalizing on the results of previous programming, interventions will be supported for the development of joint models, tools and infrastructures for the monitoring, forecasting and management of risks (coastal erosion, fires, floods, navigation risks), as well as actions to encourage and improve coordination between the territories of the cross-border area to strengthen integrated risk management capacities.

As highlighted during the meeting held in March 2021 with the representatives of the Italian and Maltese national hubs, as well as with the national and regional authorities of the two Member States, the actions to be undertaken by the programme are consistent with the priority areas of the WestMED initiative, which take into account both the wider EU policies on maritime development and regional and national priorities. As defined in the Framework for Actions, the work of the WestMED Initiative is in fact focused, among others, on achieving the objective of a safer and more protected maritime space (Goal 1) by pursuing both the cooperation of coast guard functions (Priority 1) and maritime safety and response to marine pollution (Priority 2).

The actions of the Programme under this specific objective have great potential to contribute effectively also to the provisions of the EUSAIR Action Plan (Pillar 3), especially in relation to

increased readiness to deal with artificial risks, such as hydrocarbon spills, which has also been identified as a flagship project.

2.2.3 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2
Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
2	2.1	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	0	25
2	2.1	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solutions	0	4

Table 3
Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	2.1	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solutions	0	2022	4	Monitoring System	

2.2.4 Main target groups

[7 000]

With the aim of increasing the resilience of ecosystems and populations subject to natural and anthropogenic risks, the programme aims to support the bodies and organizations that through the actions carried out, will be stimulated to adopt solutions that improve the implementation of resilience and adaptation measures to climate change in cross-border areas. More concretely, given the type of actions listed above and the expected results, the target groups include:

- Local, regional, national authorities and other public institutions and agencies;
- Universities and research centres
- Civil protection corps and emergency services;
- Educational institutions of all levels
- Civil society organisations.
- Associations active in the environmental sectors

The target groups identified therefore include public and private entities that will be involved or positively influenced by the actions and that could benefit from better environmental and risk management.

2.2.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: point (e)(iv) of Article 17(3) [7 000].

The whole area of cooperation is affected by the actions envisaged in this specific objective.

2.2.6 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3) [7 000]

Not applicable

2.2.7 Indicative breakdown of EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(iv) of Article 17(3); point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4

Dimension 1 — Intervention field

Priority n.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.1	058- - Climate change adaptation measures, prevention and management of climate-related risks: floods and landslides (including awareness-raising actions, civil protection, disaster management systems, infrastructure and ecosystem-based approaches))	8.294.981
2	ERDF	2.1	061 - Prevention and management of climate-related natural risks (e.g. earthquakes) and risks related to human activities (e.g. technological incidents), including awareness-raising actions, civil protection and disaster management systems	

Table 5

Dimension 2 — Form of financing

Priority No.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.1	01	8.294.981

Table 6

Dimension 3 — Territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.1	33	8.294.981

2.2.8 Specific objective 2.2 (vi) - Promoting the transition to a circular economy in the cross-border area

Reference: Article 17(3)(e) [300]

2.2.9 Relate types of actions, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

[7 000]

The strategy of the Programme, in line with the guidelines of the "Green Deal" and with the second "EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy", entrusts the transition to the circular economy with a supporting role for the regional and national policies of Sicily and Malta in the fight against climate change.

Also because of its size, the programme will mainly support non-structural measures that

complement and integrate possible cooperation actions and the structural interventions adopted by Sicily and Malta under their respective mainstream programmes.

In this logic, the types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH (Do No Significant Harm) principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature. However, a selection criterion on the sustainable development is going to be applied in the project assessment falling within this kind of actions on the basis of measures adopted by the applicants, which potentially reduce negative environmental impacts.

The actions that are planned to be activated in PO 2 with reference to this specific objective are:

- Interventions for the diffusion of the circular economy**

Multi-level promotion and awareness-raising interventions are planned in the cross-border target sectors (urban and marine litter, textiles, agri-food, personal protection linked to COVID-19 equipment) aimed at the main actors along the value chain (companies, public bodies, consumers / citizens).

Other types of intervention will concern the development of new production/consumption models based on a circular approach that can also give rise to new business opportunities as well as the exchange of experiences and pilot actions for the adoption at the level of local regulations and / or other regulatory measures aimed at implementing the circular economy also through forms of incentive.

The programme could also carry out pilot interventions for the development of innovative systems for the management, recovery and reuse of organic and non-organic solid waste and their subsequent reintegration into the production cycle in economic chains of common interest (ecodesign).

In this regard, as highlighted during the meeting held in March 2021 with the representatives of the Italian and Maltese national hubs, as well as with the national and regional authorities of the two Member States, the WestMED assistance mechanism acts on specific experiences and requirements raised by stakeholders in the geographical scope of the Initiative, completely synergistic and complementary to the programme, focusing on circular bioeconomy with a focus on islands and small island environments.

2.2.10 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article17(3); point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2
Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
2	2.2	RCO 84	Pilot actions jointly developed and implemented within projects	Pilot actions	0	1
2	2.2	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solutions	0	4

Table 3

Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	2.2	RC R 10 4	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solutions	0	2022	4	Monitoring System	

2.2.11 Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

[7 000]

With the aim of supporting and promoting the transition towards more sustainable and environmentally friendly consumption patterns, the programme aims to encourage the participation of actors along the waste management, recovery and reuse chains that encourage the spread of virtuous practices and support the structural policies of the respective Member States.

More concretely, given the type of actions listed above and the expected results, the target groups include:

- Local, regional, national authorities and other public institutions and agencies;
- Universities and research centers;
- Enterprises, including MSMEs;
- Business support organisations;
- Chambers of commerce, clusters, incubators, living labs;
- Educational institutions of all levels
- Civil society organisations;
- Associations active in the environmental sectors;
- Consumer associations.

The target groups identified therefore include public and private entities that will be involved or positively influenced by the actions and that could benefit from a better management of the consumption chain.

2.2.12 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3) [7 000].

The whole area of cooperation is affected by the actions envisaged in this specific objective.

2.2.13 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3) [7 000]

Not applicable

2.2.14 Indicative breakdown of EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(iv) of Article 17(3); point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4
Dimension 1 — Intervention field

Priority n.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.2	071 - Promotion of the use of recycled materials as raw materials	4.147.490

Table 5
Dimension 2 — Form of financing

Priority No.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.2	01	4.147.490

Table 6
Dimension 3 — Territorial delivery mechanism and territorial approach

Priority No.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.2	33	4.147.490

2.2.15 Specific objective 2.3 (vii) - Strengthening the protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity, green infrastructure and reducing pollution in the cross-border area

Reference: Article 17(3)(e) [300]

2.2.16 Related type of actions and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

[7 000]

The strategy of the Programme, in accordance with the indications provided by the Commission with the Country Report 2019, and in harmony with the "EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030", envisages mitigating the impact of climate change on biodiversity through non-structural actions that complement and integrate possible cooperation actions and the structural measures adopted by Sicily and Malta within their respective mainstream programmes, in line with the respective Prioritised Action Frameworks (PAFs).

In this logic, the types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH (Do No Significant Harm) principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature,

The interventions will be concentrated in the Protected Areas, in the terrestrial and marine nature reserves, in the Parks, in the sites of the Natura 2000 network and in the ecological connection corridors, continuing and capitalizing on the action already started under the TO6 of the 2014-2020 programming cycle.

The nature of the interventions includes the so-called nature-based and marine-based solutions that provide a wide spectrum of ecosystem services, to integrate the needs of risk mitigation with the protection and recovery of ecosystems and biodiversity.

More specifically, alternative solutions will be promoted to conserve, sustainably manage and preserve the functionality of natural ecosystems or restore it in human-altered ecosystems.

A selection criterion on the sustainable development is going to be applied in the project assessment falling within this kind of actions on the basis of measures adopted by the applicants, which

potentially reduce negative environmental impacts.

The actions that are planned to be activated in PO 2 with reference to this specific objective are:

- **Interventions for the monitoring and control of the marine and coastal environment**

Interventions that promote the use of technologies aimed at minimizing the risks to which the ecosystems of the area are exposed, and which make them vulnerable are supported.

In particular, solutions that allow the mapping of degraded ecosystems and target habitats and species threatened by the presence of IAS are encouraged; tools to monitor the distribution of microplastics (marine litter); pilot solutions for the reduction of pollutants in port areas (CO₂, pollutants, noise, etc.).

The interventions also include the construction of green and blue infrastructure for the protection of marine ecosystems to counteract the effects of climate change and extreme events and to improve the quality of life in the cross-border area.

- **Interventions to preserve biodiversity and marine and terrestrial areas of naturalistic value**

Interventions aimed at creating, restoring and maintaining natural areas shall be supported, including in order to mitigate the fragmentation of ecosystems.

In particular, actions to combat the introduction, naturalization and spread of invasive alien species that cause damage to biodiversity in Sicily and Malta are encouraged; actions for the conservation of existing living resources; actions to protect threatened or endangered species; pilot actions for the restoration of existing ecosystems.

Actions are also planned to support the creation of ecological corridors that prevent genetic isolation, allow the migration of species, preserve and strengthen the integrity of ecosystems.

- **Actions for the integrated management of parks and marine protected areas**

Interventions for the environmental and economic enhancement of the existing natural heritage are supported also through the realization of small interventions that improve its use.

Pilot actions are also planned for the construction of small infrastructures of a material and immaterial nature for the improvement of the usability of the assets of the area, according to an integrated and sustainable approach (interventions for the material accessibility of the cultural and natural offer such as underwater paths, coastal paths and sustainable submarines, tools for the dissemination of online knowledge, mobile applications).

Finally, it is planned to build small green and blue infrastructures to safeguard marine ecosystems to counteract the effects of climate change and extreme events and to improve the quality of life in the cross-border area.

- **Definition of common strategies and action plans**

System actions oriented towards blue growth are supported in synergy with the other initiatives implemented (WESTMED Initiative, PO INTERREG NEXT Italia Tunisia and PO INTERREG NEXT MED).

More specifically, as highlighted during the meeting held in March 2021 with the representatives of the Italian and Maltese national hubs, as well as with the national and regional authorities of the two Member States, the WestMED assistance mechanism acts on specific experiences and requirements raised by stakeholders within the geographical scope of the Initiative, which are completely synergistic and complementary to the programme, focusing for example on the conservation and awareness of environmental and cultural heritage.

The actions of the Programme under this specific objective have great potential to contribute

effectively also to the provisions of the EUSAIR Action Plan (Pillar 3), in particular in relation to the protection of natural habitats, ecosystems and maritime protected areas and the management of coastal areas and maritime space, which is also part of EUSAIR's flagship initiatives.

2.2.17 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2
Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
2	2.3	RCO 84	Pilot actions jointly developed and implemented within projects	Pilot actions	0	3
2	2.3	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solutions	0	5

Table 3
Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base line	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	2.3	RCR 79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategies / action plans	0	2022	3	Monitoring System	
2	2.3	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solutions	0	2022	5	Monitoring System	

2.2.18 Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)
[7 000]

With the aim of mitigating the impact of climate change on biodiversity and protecting ecosystems, the programme aims to involve target groups able to adopt solutions to improve nature protection, reduce pollution in the area and promote the use of heritage.

More concretely, given the type of actions listed above and the expected results, the target groups include:

- Local, regional, national authorities and other public institutions and agencies;
- Universities and research centers;
- Managing bodies of sites, reserves, parks, protected areas;
- Enterprises, including MSMEs;
- Business support organisations;

- Civil society organisations;
- Associations active in the environmental sectors.

The target groups identified therefore include public and private entities that will be involved or positively influenced by the actions and efforts of the Programme to protect biodiversity and combat pollution.

2.2.19 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: point (e)(iv) of Article 17(3) [7 000].

The whole area of cooperation is affected by the actions envisaged in this specific objective.

2.2.20 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3) [7 000]

Not applicable

2.2.21 Indicative breakdown of EU programme resources by type of intervention

point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4

Dimension 1 — Intervention field

Priority n.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.3	078 - Protection, restoration and sustainable use of Natura 2000 sites	8.294.981
2	ERDF	2.3	079 - Protection of nature and biodiversity, heritage and natural resources, green and blue infrastructure	

Table 5

Dimension 2 — Form of financing

Priority No.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.3	01	8.294.981

Table 6

Dimension 3 — Territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.3	33	8.294.981

2.3 Title of PRIORITY 3 (P04) – An area of efficient cooperation in social capital through the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development

Reference: Article 17(3)(d) [300]

2.3.1 Specific objective 3.1 (vi) - Strengthening the role of culture and sustainable tourism in the cross-border area in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation

Reference: Article 17(3)(e) [300]

2.3.2 Related types of action and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

[7 000]

A strategic role in achieving the priorities envisaged for a more inclusive and economically developed area of cooperation will also be assumed by the policies of culture and sustainable tourism in a perspective of both inclusion and social innovation as well in a perspective of economic growth.

The programme aims to enhance the theme of "usability for all" of cultural and natural heritage assets by experimenting with solutions that allow the regeneration of spaces and the revitalization of places of culture to promote initiatives in the cultural and creative field with the aim of inclusion and economic development.

In this logic, the types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH (Do No Significant Harm) principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

The actions that are planned to be activated in PO 4 with reference to this specific objective support and integrate the possible cooperation actions and structural interventions adopted by Sicily and Malta as part of their respective mainstream programmes and are:

- **Revitalization and promotion of places of culture and other spaces for cultural and social purposes**

Actions aimed at increasing the level of attractiveness of the tourism and cultural system through the modernisation of tangible and intangible infrastructures of the historical, cultural and environmental heritage, the improvement of the digital capacity of use and physical and cognitive accessibility, support for the green transition shall be supported.

Action is also envisaged to develop an inclusive cultural heritage and a sector of the creative industry, with inclusive spaces, technologies, learning and job opportunities that increase the cultural participation of citizens, which is generally limited in both countries.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the system of restrictions connected to it, especially in periods of lockdown, has among other things aggravated the situation, marginalizing even more the population groups without the tools and digital technical resources necessary for the remote use of natural and cultural heritage assets able to offer virtual participation

Interventions aimed at jointly developing digital brands and tools around territorial characteristics, natural features, local products and crafts, etc., are also envisaged; strengthen, orient and make homogeneous the entire value chain of cross-border tourism with respect to the sustainability objectives (Goals Agenda 2030); develop innovative solutions and new business models in culture and tourism also ensuring inclusion.

Furthermore, actions aimed at diversification, requalification, development of new sustainable and responsible tourism products oriented to new market niches (ecotourism, cultural tourism, food and wine, well-being), also through the involvement of the population (community-based tourism) will be supported.

In this regard, as highlighted during the meeting held in March 2021 with the representatives of the Italian and Maltese national hubs, as well as with the national and regional authorities of the two Member States, the WestMED assistance mechanism acts on specific experiences and requirements raised by stakeholders in the geographical scope of the Initiative, completely synergistic and complementary to the programme, also focusing on the conservation and awareness of environmental and cultural heritage and integrated tourism initiatives towards common paths and experiences. In addition, thanks to the so-called "Accelerator on Sustainable Tourism" the goal is to increase networking between economic operators in a common tourism system, focused on marine ecotourism and nature, and accelerate the adoption of innovative business models and technologies.

The actions of the Programme under this specific objective have great potential to contribute effectively also to the provisions of the EUSAIR Action Plan (Pillar 4) which focuses on capacity

building in the tourism sector, in particular with flagship projects dedicated to skills and thematic pathways.

Particularly in this specific objective, projects are expected to contribute to the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, to gender, age, ethnicity, health conditions equality and non-discrimination, as well as accessibility. Appropriate criteria shall be thus applied at the stage of project selection, monitoring and evaluation.

2.3.3 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2
Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
3	3.1	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	0	16
3	3.1	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solutions	0	4

Table 3
Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	3.1	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up scaled by organisations	Solutions	0	2022	4	Monitoring System	

2.3.4 Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

[7 000]

With the aim of promoting social and economic development through one of the key sectors of the economy of the two territories, the programme aims to involve target groups able to promote the widest use of the cross-border natural and cultural heritage.

More concretely, given the type of actions listed above and the expected results, the target groups include:

- Local, regional, national authorities and other public institutions and agencies;
- Universities and research centers;
- Managing bodies of sites, reserves, parks, protected areas;
- Enterprises, including MSMEs;
- Business support organisations;

- Civil society organisations;
- Associations active in the environmental sectors, the enhancement of natural and cultural heritage;
- Bodies and/or associations promoting the active participation of disadvantaged subjects;
- Educational institutions of all levels.

The target groups identified therefore include public and private entities that will be involved or positively influenced by the actions and efforts of the programme to improve the use of natural and cultural heritage.

2.3.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3) [7 000].

The whole area of cooperation is affected by the actions envisaged in this specific objective.

2.3.6 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(v) [7 000]

Not applicable

2.3.7 Indicative breakdown of EU programme resources by type of intervention

point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4

Dimension 1 — Intervention field

Priority n.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	3.1	165 - Protection, development and promotion of public tourism goods and tourist services	4.608.323
3	ERDF	3.1	166 - Protection, development and promotion of cultural heritage and cultural services	

Table 5

Dimension 2 — Form of financing

Priority No.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	3.1	01	4.608.323

Table 6

Dimension 3 — Territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	3.1	33	4.608.323

2.4 Title of PRIORITY 4 (ISO1) - An area of cooperation with better governance between Italy and Malta

Reference: Article 17(3)(d) [300]

2.4.1 Specific objective 4.1 (d) - Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of cooperation in the cross-border area

Reference: Article 17(3)(e) [300]

2.4.2 Related types of actions and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

[7 000]

The Programme's strategy aims to strengthen the efficiency of public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens and institutions, in particular with a view to ensuring multi-level governance that allows for the harmonisation, integration and capitalisation of results between ETC and mainstream programmes of the respective countries and overcoming the administrative and bureaucratic legal obstacles.

The type of interventions that are planned to be activated in Specific Objective 1 of INTERREG with reference to this action are:

- **Capitalization, mainstreaming and administrative capacity**

Exchanges of experience and initiatives shall be activated to increase the capacity of public authorities to prepare integrated cross-border initiatives/strategies, to identify and respond to crises and emergencies and to ensure synergy with mainstream initiatives.

Actions dedicated to the development of forms of inter-institutional cooperation between ETC programmes and mainstream programmes are also supported in order to maximise the effectiveness of interventions with a view to complementarity.

In this framework, the programme intends to participate in the experimentation of a multi-programme coordination mechanism (enhanced cooperation) with other Interreg Programmes in the Mediterranean (cfr section 1.2).

Finally, initiatives to capitalise on the results achieved and to develop joint monitoring systems for the detection of progress in the cross-border area with regard to the challenges of the ecological transition (e.g. in terms of circular economy), mitigation of the effects of climate change and prevention of disaster risks are supported.

2.4.3 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2
Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
4	4.1	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solutions	0	7

Table 3
Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
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Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
4	4.1	RC R 10 4	Solutions taken up or up scaled by organisations	Solutions	0	2022	7	Monitoring System	

2.4.4 Main target group

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

[7 000]

Target groups can be both individuals and organisations that may be involved or influenced in various ways by the actions and which, therefore, will be able to implement specific cross-border actions thanks to the elimination of obstacles that prevented their full effectiveness. Target groups include both public and private actors covering a wide range of different sectors and levels of governance, such as policy makers, public administrations, education and training organisations, organisations and associations and businesses, including MPMIs. Target groups also include all population groups that will benefit from the improved efficiency of institutions and actors, local, regional, cross-border, international.

2.4.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the intended use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3) [7 000].

The whole area of cooperation is affected by the actions envisaged in this specific objective.

2.4.6 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3) [7 000]

Not applicable

2.4.7 Indicative breakdown of EU programme resources by type of intervention

point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4

Dimension 1 — Intervention field

Priority n.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	4.1	173 - Strengthening the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement territorial cooperation projects and initiatives in cross-border, transnational, maritime and interregional contexts	6.912.484

Table 5

Dimension 2 — Form of financing

Priority No.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	4.1	01	6.912.484

Table 6

Dimension 3 — Territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No.	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	4.1	33	6.912.484

3. Financing plan

Reference: point (f) of Article 17(3)

3.1 Financial appropriations by year

Reference: point (g)(i) of Article 17(3), points (a) to (d) of Article 17(4)

Table 7

Fund	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
ERDF (Territorial cooperation goal)	0	7.801.040	7.969.966	8.087.094	8.233.765	6.926.352	7.065.008	46.083.225
IPA III CBC (1)								
NDICI – CBC (1)								
IPA III (2)								
NDICI (2)								
OCTP (3)								
Interreg Funds (4)								
Total	0	7.801.040	7.969.966	8.087.094	8.233.765	6.926.352	7.065.008	46.083.225
(1) Interreg A, External cross-border cooperation. (2) Interreg B and C. (3) Interreg B, C and D. (4) ERDF, IPA III, NDICI or OCT Programme, where as single amount under Interreg B and C.								

3.2 Total financial appropriations by fund and national co-financing

Reference: point (f)(ii) of Article 17(3), points (a) to (d) of Article 17(4)

Table 8

Policy objective No	Priority	Fund (as applicable)	Basis for the calculation EU support (total eligible costs or public contribution)	EU contribution a)=(a1)+(a2)	Indicative breakdown of the EU contribution		National contribution (b)=(c)+d)	Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart		Total (e)=(a)+(b)	Co-financing rate (f)=(a)/e	Contributions from third countries (for information)
					without TA pursuant to Article 27 (1) (a1)	without TA pursuant to Article 27 (1) (a1)		National public (c)	National private (d)			
SO1	Priority 1	ERDF	total eligible costs	13.824.968	12.857.220	967.748	3.456.242	3.456.242	0	17.281.209	80%	
SO2	Priority 2	ERDF	total eligible costs	20.737.451	19.285.830	1.451.622	5.184.363	5.184.363	0	25.921.814	80%	
SO3	Priority 3	ERDF	total eligible costs	4.608.323	4.285.740	322.583	1.152.081	1.152.081	0	5.760.403	80%	
ISO1	Priority 4	ERDF	total eligible costs	6.912.484	6.428.610	483.874	1.728.121	1.728.121	0	8.640.605	80%	
	Total	All funds		46.083.225	42.857.399	3.225.826	11.520.806	11.520.806	0	57.604.031	80%	

- (1) Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation.
(2) Interreg B and C.
(3) Interreg B, C and D.
(4) ERDF, IPA III, NDICI or OCTP, where as single amount under Interreg B and C.

4. Actions taken to involve the relevant programme partners in the preparation of the Interreg programme and the role of those programme in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Reference: point (g) of Article 17(3) 10 000

Following the decision of the Monitoring Committee of the INTERREG V-A Italia-Malta programme dated 05/03/2020, the institution of the 2021-2027 task force for the preparation of the Italia-Malta 2021-2027 programme was launched. Task Force, which on 19/05/2020 approved its rules of procedure, remains in power until the establishment of the 2021-2027 Monitoring Committee.

The composition of the Task Force provided for the presence of at least three and up to five decision-making representatives from each Member State, as well as the presence of a representative of the European Commission, of experts and/or observers with an advisory role and representatives of the Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat.

In the first half of 2021, the task force approved the consultation path of the partnership identifying the composition and methods of involvement of the latter in the preparation of the programme, based on the provisions of Delegated Regulation (EU) no. 240/2014 on a European code of conduct.

The approach chosen for the consultation of the partnership had the objective of ensuring transparency and the effective involvement of the relevant partners in the preparation of the programme, with particular reference to the strategic and operational programming phases approved by the Task Force on 19 May 2020.

In particular, the consultation of the relevant partners of the programme took place in the phases of:

- consolidation of the strategic choices, challenges and needs of the cooperation area deriving from the analysis of the territorial context of the two countries;
- collection of ideas and proposals on possible actions and potential beneficiaries to be included in the new programme;
- reconnaissance of the current transboundary context, with reference to the environmental components for the purposes of the strategic environmental assessment process;
- sharing of the new cooperation programme.

For each of these areas, a different approach based on information, consultation and involvement actions has been privileged from time to time.

At the end of the territorial analysis process, the data emerged from the same were reworked in order to define the common challenges and needs of the cooperation area from which the choices related to the strategic objectives and specific objectives of the new programme descended.

The activity was the subject of a first public consultation, based on a "thematic" approach, which had the aim of collecting suggestions, ideas, proposals on possible actions to be included in the new programme.

The audience of subjects involved in the consultation was identified using a double methodology, push & pull.

Initially, based on the needs emerged from the territorial analysis, a desk-type survey of the subjects of the partnership (push) was carried out. Therefore, a list of the main stakeholders belonging to one of the following categories has been drawn up: regional, local, city and other competent public authorities; economic and social partners; bodies representing civil society, such as environmental partners, non-governmental organisations and bodies promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination; other bodies including European groups of territorial cooperation and authorities or bodies involved in the development or implementation of a macro-regional or sea-basin strategy.

Then, the list of stakeholders was published in the main media of the programme with the aim both to allow any subjects / entities that had not initially been considered to express their interest in being included in the list of the cross-border partnership and to acquire from the latter a "concept note" on possible strategic guidelines on which to focus the actions of the future Italia-Malta programme, implementation strategies, governance models, etc. (pull).

At the end of these activities, a list of 273 entities in the cross-border area was drawn up, including,

inter alia, regional departments and ministries of the Maltese state, environmental authorities, universities, higher technical institutes, research organisations and centres, enterprises (including spin-offs/start-ups), technological and production districts, science parks, incubators, consortia, non-profit and third sector associations, local authorities and associations of the latter, environmental associations and trade associations.

These subjects were the recipients of the activities of consultation and consolidation of the possible eligible actions of the programme through participation in five different thematic tables organized by the Joint Secretariat in November 2021, in agreement with the Managing Authority and the representatives of the States of Malta and Italy (member State and Sicily Region): Tourism and Cultural Heritage; Climate Change/Risk Management; Environmental Protection; Research & Innovation/Competitiveness; Governance.

The tables were held through a methodology of online participatory discussion that, borrowing the model of the *World Café*, created a work environment totally free of stress and external pressures, in order to inspire the participants and invite them to a free and participatory discussion.

Through this methodology, the guests at the table had the opportunity to discuss together the objectives, goals, aims of the future Italia Malta 2021-2027 programme and to propose actions/projects that can be financed with cross-border value.

Each table has been organized with the following format:

- a) presentation of the MA to introduce the aim of the tables and the expected results related to the discussion on eligible actions;
- b) intervention of the Joint Secretariat to present the main ideas emerged from the context analysis of the cross-border area regarding the policy objectives, the "lessons learned", the results obtained from the 14-20 programme and the possible future challenges of the 21-27 programme;
- c) intervention of the Nucleo di Valutazione e Verifica degli Investimenti Pubblici della Regione Siciliana (Evaluation and Verification unit of Public Investments of the Sicilian Region) regarding the main strategic references, elements of the context and first hypotheses of intervention for the support policies in each of the policy objectives covered by the 5 tables;
- d) intervention of a lead partner of a project implemented in cycle 14-20 of the INTERREG V-A Italia-Malta programme for each PO that has achieved important results both with reference to the objectives and with reference to the cross-border nature of the project;
- e) opening of the debate on a list of possible eligible actions through the support of a national expert in charge of moderating the table;
- f) online voting through the platform www.menti.com of the eligible actions selected in order to allow each qualified partnership representative to 1) evaluate the actions on the basis of a strategic interest 2) order the priority of the actions within a ranking.

As part of the thematic table "Research & Innovation / Competitiveness" there were 132 subjects, of which 106 Italian and 26 Maltese, belonging to the university sector / research centers, state and regional administrations, local authorities (Municipalities and Metropolitan Cities), local companies, associations, Production Districts / Territorial Development Agencies, Chambers of Commerce and ITS. Of the persons registered representing the bodies described, 40 were placed in structures already benefiting from the programme.

As part of the thematic table "Climate Change/Risk Management" there were 82 subjects, of which 64 Italian and 18 Maltese. As part of the thematic table "Environmental Protection" there were 145 qualified subjects of which 118 Italians and 27 Maltese. In both cases, the subjects present belonged to sectors similar to those described above, to which were added the representatives of the Management Bodies of Protected Areas, nature reserves and parks. Of the participants in the "Climate Change/Risk Management" table, 34 were included in structures already beneficiaries of the programme; of the participants in the table "Environmental Protection" 43 subjects were included in structures already beneficiaries of the programme.

Similar representativeness took place in the context of the thematic table "Tourism and cultural heritage" in which 84 subjects were registered, of which 64 Italians and 20 Maltese: of these 31

subjects were included in structures already beneficiaries of the programme.

Finally, as part of the thematic table "Governance", while reconfirming the representativeness of the entities already listed, there was a more substantial presence of local authorities (Municipalities and Metropolitan Cities). Overall, 66 subjects were registered, of which 50 were Italian and 16 Maltese. Of the persons registered representing the bodies described, 28 were placed in structures already benefiting from the programme.

The Monitoring Committee of the INTERREG V-A Italia Malta Programme was informed of the results of the discussions during the meeting held in December 2021.

In the first quarter of 2022, the activity of identification, involvement and consultation of the authorities with environmental competences and of the community interested in the effects on the environment due to the application of the programme was also carried out in order to arrive at the drafting of the environmental report.

Once the operational arrangements of the programme, the indicators, the financial allocations have been defined, the draft programme approved by the task force has been put into public consultation through the programme's and the respective regional/national web platforms.

5. Approach to communication and visibility for the Interreg programme (objectives, target audiences, communication channels, including social media outreach, where appropriate, planned budget and relevant indicators for monitoring and evaluation)

Reference: point (h) of Article 17(3) 4500

The communication of the programme pursues both internal and external objectives, strongly linked to the objectives of the programme, so as to consolidate the cross-border Italian-Maltese community, give value and visibility to the actions and create a culture of cooperation. The general objectives are:

- 1) inform citizens about the EU's role in supporting maritime cooperation, cohesion and sustainable development;
- 2) raise awareness of the programme's funding opportunities and incentivise wider participation;
- 3) support the beneficiaries, communicate the results of the projects and their impact on the territories.

The communication actions, appropriately targeted, will reach a wide audience of the programme area: 1) the (potential) beneficiaries as public/private organisations; 2) the cross-border community meant as a general public, economic/social partners, decision-makers; 3) the media, public authorities, EU institutions/networks, other programmes.

Considering the challenges of cross-border communication, the strategy will be based on a number of key principles:

- tailor-made approach and constant dialogue with stakeholders;
- simple language built on key messages, respectful of differences;
- transparency, interactivity, authenticity;
- creative actions, tangible online and offline;
- innovative communication channels;
- integrated and synergistic cross-border actions, including by promoting joint initiatives between programmes;
- dissemination of results.

The final goal is to give visibility to the results of the program both in the reference territories and outside the programme area. The Italian language and the English language will be used depending on the target group of the communication.

The programme communication follows three lines of action, using the following instruments:

- 1) Institutional communication, pursued through the following instruments:
 - Harmonised programme/project branding

- Information and communication material
 - Audiovisuals, podcasts, digital publications
 - Web portal offering access to all programmes involving Member States
 - Online communication (social media, EU platforms)
- 2) Networking, pursued through the following tools:
- Events (meetings, info-days, workshops, exhibitions, ateliers)
 - Networks (regional/national/EU events and Interreg joint events)
- 3) External communication, pursued through the following instruments
- Integrated communication campaigns (online/offline)
 - Ecological promotional materials with low environmental impact
 - Relations with the media (press releases, press conferences)

As far as social media is concerned, the existing channels of the program (Facebook, Twitter) will be strengthened and new profiles will be created on channels such as Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn. Depending on new IT developments, the social media mix may evolve throughout the programme's lifecycle; priority will be given to the media that can bring Europe closer to its citizens. The type of messages conveyed through social media will be differentiated according to the target audience of the latter.

Any type of communication activity will be based on the "green" and "inclusion" principles: paperless communication, electronic publications, use of recycled materials, green events, accessible places for all, adequate measures of use and participation by disadvantaged groups (deaf, visually impaired, etc.).

The Managing Authority will appoint a communication officer, who will be responsible for all communication and visibility actions of the programme.

A budget of approximately 1% of the programme is allocated for the purposes of programme communication. Resources will be distributed throughout the duration of the programme, with a peak at stages decisive for the life of the programme such as: the publication of project selection notices, the achievement of intermediate results, the final phase of the programme's life.

All communication and visibility actions will be evaluated regularly and in close connection with the evaluations that will affect the programme. The data will be collected through the Internal Monitoring Systems of the Managing Authority, interviews, website analysis, social media metrics, desk analysis. A detailed set of quantitative and qualitative indicators will be defined, to evaluate all communication actions and improve their performance.

6. Indication of support for small-scale projects, including small projects within small project funds

Reference: point (i) of Article 17(3); Article 24 (7000)

In a spirit of strengthening and continuity with the 14-20 programming, the 21-27 programme aims to ensure further measures to simplify and reduce administrative burdens. In light of this main foundation, the programme also supports small-scale projects (SSP). Small-scale projects with a relatively limited budget and more simplified administrative arrangements for the beneficiaries who implement them will facilitate the involvement of local communities while ensuring the participation of a larger number of citizens, thus contributing to European integration and territorial cohesion.

Although during the implementation of the previous programme no specific selection notices were activated for small-scale projects, the experience gained has nevertheless allowed to record a strong participation of subjects such as NGOs, trade and environmental associations, port authorities, local health centers that have taken part in the implementation of the interventions in the quality of "stakeholders / takers". This dimension of attracting new partners and encouraging the participation of smaller organisations has in fact led the programme authorities to launch a specific public capitalisation notice to also provide for the possible participation of these entities.

Although data on the outcomes of the capitalisation notice are not available at the date of writing

the programme, it is confirmed that small organisations in the cross-border area do not possess administrative, financial, and adequate human resources capacity for the management of cooperation projects. Therefore, it can be confirmed that in order to ensure the functioning and success of SSP, simplified cost mechanisms, such as flat rates (pursuant Article 55(1) of the CPR), must be provided for in order to reduce administrative burdens and costs and eliminate any risk of error.

Therefore, the 2021-2027 programme intends to focus on a strategy to support small-scale projects (SSP) based on:

- the broad involvement of new beneficiaries (including small organisations and associations) in order to inform them about the opportunities of SSP;
- the appropriate allocation of financial resources from programme funds to SSP;
- the development of projects with a simplified approach, for example by reporting expenditure at flat rates (pursuant Art. 55(1) of the CPR);
- the possibility for SSP; projects to report staff at flat rates in accordance with Article 55(1) of the CPR.

Based on the experience of Notice 03/2022 of the 2014-2020 Programme, the selection of PPS projects could cover the following themes related to the following specific objectives of the Programme: Ob.Sp: 1.2 (iv) strengthening human capital and acquiring new skills; Ob. Sp. 2.1 (iv) risk management and safety of the territory and the sea, Ob Sp. 2.2 (vi) awareness-raising actions for the circular economy, Ob. Sp. 3.1 (vi) strengthening of culture with the aim of inclusion and economic development, Ob. Sp. 4.1 (d) strengthening of the capacities and efficiency of the PA.

The objective of the PPS is to carry out joint actions from below to ensure the widest participation of citizens and small organisations in the area for the purposes of the programme. Therefore, in this perspective, young people and students of the two territories will also be strongly involved in gaming actions, promotion of mobility experiences, cross-border competitions for awareness-raising actions on the issues of the circular economy and the enhancement of culture and tourist heritage. The maximum amount of resources dedicated to the activation of specific SSP selection notices is about 1.5 meuro.

The implementation of the SSP will have to be ensured by a commitment by the MA to disburse a financial advance payment very quickly in order to guarantee an adequate and sufficient cash flow for the implementation of the interventions. Financial guarantees may be required to mitigate the risk of recoveries. SSP payments can be based on the achievement of milestones, which correspond to the delivery of a specific output. The delivery of the output can be considered completed even after the conclusion of the follow-up of the output in question, including the provision of sufficient documentation relating to the achievement of the expected objectives of the output.

As required by art. 53 (2) of the CPR, the entire project budget may be limited to a maximum of €200,000 and each project partner may have allocated a limited budget of up to €100,000. No minimum partner budget may be required, but each partner should be responsible for at least one of the outputs. Given the nature of SSPs, the total number of partners should be limited to a maximum of 4 including the lead partner. Associated partners may be admitted, without financial support.

Limited participation of larger bodies, such as universities, research centres/bodies, as well as national ministries or regional authorities, may be envisaged in order to encourage small organisations to take advantage of this opportunity.

The implementation of the project should be limited to 18 months.

7. Implementing provisions

7.1 Programme authorities

Reference: point (a) of Article 17 (6)

Programme authorities	Name of the institution [255]	Contact name [200]	E-mail [200]
Managing Authority	Regione Siciliana – Presidenza – Dipartimento regionale della Programmazione (Sicilian Region – Presidency – Regional Department of Programming)	General Manager pro tempore	dipartimento.programmazione@regione.sicilia.it
National authority (for programmes with participating third countries or partner countries, if applicable)			
Audit Authority	Regione Siciliana – Presidenza – Ufficio speciale autorità di audit dei programmi cofinanziati dalla commissione europea (Sicilian Region – Presidency – Special Audit Authority of the programmes co-financed by the European Commission)	General Manager pro tempore	autorita.audit@regione.sicilia.it
Group of auditors representatives			
Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	Ministero Economia e Finanze - IGRUE (Ministry of Economy and Finance - IGRUE)		

7.2 Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

Reference: point (b) of Article 17(6) [3 500]

According to Article 46.2 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, the Joint Secretariat (JS) assists the managing authority and the monitoring committee in carrying out their respective functions. The headquarter of the JS is at the Dipartimento regionale della Programmazione – the Managing Authority of the Programme.

The Joint Secretariat (JS) is set up after consultation with the Member States participating in the programme by the Managing Authority, which determines its composition, recruitment procedure and functioning rules, bearing also in mind the programme's partnership and in accordance with relevant national legislation. A coordinator is identified to support the Managing Authority.

The Joint Secretariat contributes to:

- the management, the implementation and the monitoring of the programme, and the monitoring of the projects;
- the capitalization of Programme's results;
- the communication activities and information to potential beneficiaries on funding opportunities under the programme;
- the assistance to beneficiaries and partners in the implementation of operations.

The recruitment procedure and functioning rules of the joint secretariat are aimed at constantly promoting the prevention of illegality and giving concrete and continuous implementation to the principles of transparency, equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

7.3 Apportionment of liabilities among participating Member States and where applicable, the third or partner countries and OCTs, in the event of financial corrections imposed by the managing authority or the Commission

Reference: point (c) of Article 17(6)

(10 500)

In line with the provisions of art. 16 paragraph 5 of the ETC Regulation, it is provided that before an Interreg programme is submitted to the Commission, the participating Member States confirm in writing their agreement to its contents. That agreement also provides for a commitment by the participating Member States to provide the co-financing necessary for the implementation of the Interreg programme. Therefore, the MA and the MNCA ensure that public and private beneficiaries in their respective countries are able to co-finance operations, according to their national system.

Pursuant to art. 69 par 2 of the CPR, Member States ensure the legality and regularity of expenditure included in the accounts submitted to the Commission and take all required actions to prevent, detect and correct and report on irregularities including fraud. Those actions comprise the collection of information on the beneficial owners of the recipients of Union funding in accordance with Annex XVII and rules related to data protection rules. The Commission, the European Anti-Fraud Office and the Court of Auditors have the necessary access to that information. Therefore, the MA and the MNCA will identify under their own responsibility the bodies responsible for implementing the management verifications of the expenses incurred in their respective territories (so-called first-level control pursuant to Article 46, paragraph 3, of the ETC Reg.) in order to ensure the legality and regularity of the expenses included in the accounts submitted to the Commission.

Pursuant to art. 52 of the CTE Reg, the Managing Authority ensures the recovery from the lead or sole partner any amounts unduly paid

Beneficiaries for whom an irregularity has been established shall reimburse the lead beneficiary for the amounts unduly paid.

If the lead partner does not obtain reimbursement from the other partners, or if the Managing Authority does not obtain reimbursement from the lead or sole partner, paragraph 3 of Article 52 shall apply and the Member State on whose territory the partner concerned is located or, in the case of an EGTC, is registered, shall reimburse the managing authority any amounts unduly paid to that partner.

The managing authority is responsible for reimbursing the amounts concerned to the general budget of the Union, in accordance with the apportionment of liabilities among the participating Member States, set out in the Interreg programme.

Consequently, in the event that the State of Malta proceeds to reimburse the MA for the sums unduly paid to a Maltese beneficiary, it will also be able to secure reimbursement by the beneficiary to whom the recovery has been ordered through legal action.

With regard to responsibility for the use of Interreg funds (ERDF):

- each participating State will individually assume responsibility for the expenses of the project partners located in its territory;
- in the event of systemic irregularities or financial correction, both Italy and Malta will bear the financial consequences thereof, in proportion to the irregularity detected in their territory. Where a systemic irregularity or financial correction cannot be attributed to a specific territory of the Participating States, they will be liable in proportion to the Interreg contribution (ERDF) paid to the partners concerned in their respective national territories.

Taking into account that any corrections linked to the implementation of projects have a direct impact on the technical assistance costs paid by the Commission, it is confirmed that the same principles relating to liability for the use of Interreg funds will also be applied to determine the corrections of Technical Assistance. Therefore, taking into account the percentages already used during the 14-20 programming regarding the use of the TA resources by the MA and the MNCA, any

corrections detected in the Italian and / or Maltese territory will be directly linked to an adjustment on the costs of TA paid to the respective countries by the Commission.

8. Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Reference: Articles 94 and 95 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR)

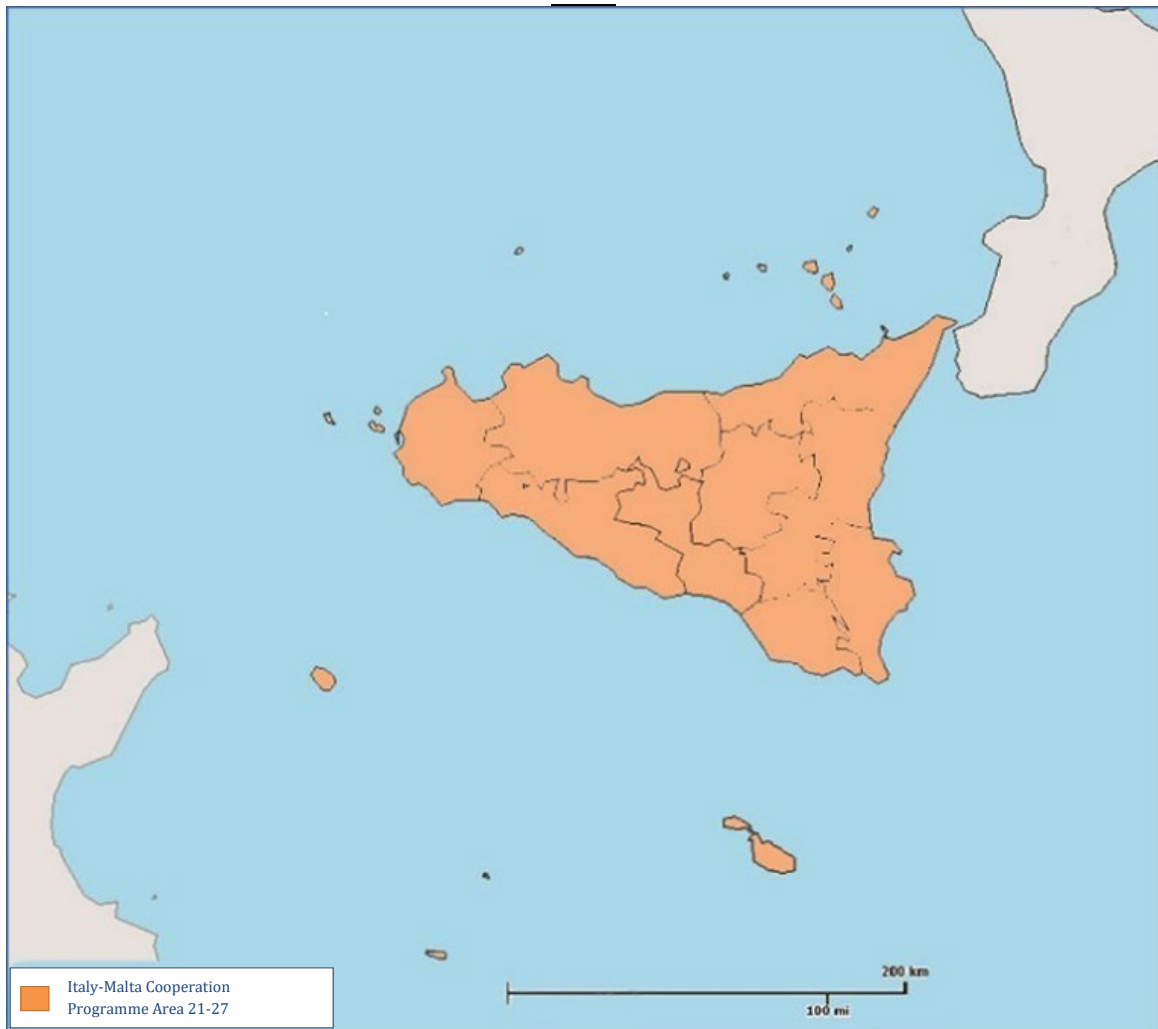
Table 10

Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to cost

Intended use of Articles 94 and 95	YES	NO
From the adoption the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates under priority according to Article 94 CPR (if yes, fill in Appendix 1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
From the adoption the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs according to Article 95 CPR (if yes, fill in Appendix 2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Annex 1

Map of the program area



Annex 2

Methodological document for the programme - (ARTT. 16-17 CPR - REG.(UE) 1060/21)

Appendix 3

List of planned operations of strategic importance with a timetable – Article 17(3)

Annex 3

Acronyms and abbreviations